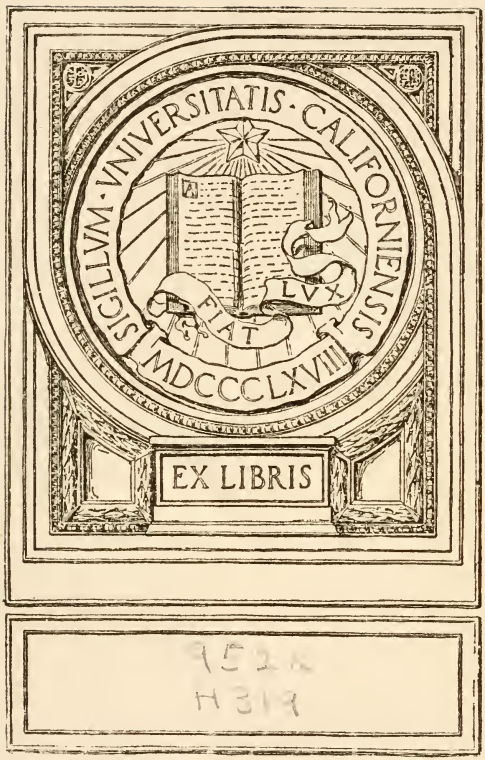
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ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

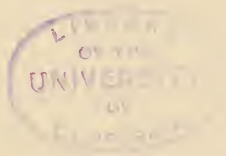
JOHN RUSKIN

ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

JOHN RUSKIN

BY

FREDERIC HARRISON



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JOHN RUSKIN

1819-1900

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

On the publication of the first volume of *Modern Painters*, Sydney Smith, the acknowledged oracle of the *Edinburgh Review* and of cultured society, is reported to have declared that "it was a work of transcendent talent, presented the most original views, and the most elegant and powerful language, and would work a complete revolution in the world of taste" (*Præterita*, ii. 165).

And so it was. The writer of the Victorian era who poured forth the greatest mass of literature upon the greatest variety of subjects, about whom most was written in his own lifetime in Europe and in America, who in the English-speaking world left the most direct and most visible imprint of his tastes and thoughts—was John Ruskin. For fifty years continuously he wrote, lectured, and talked about Mountains, Rivers, and Lakes; about Cathedrals and Landscapes; about Geology; about Minerals, Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, Music, Drawing, Political Economy, Education, Poetry, Literature, History, Mythology, Socialism, Theology, Morals.

The author of more than eighty distinct works upon so miscellaneous a field, of masses of poetry, lectures, letters as well as substantial treatises, was of necessity rather a stimulus than an authority—an influence rather than a master. As one of his foreign admirers has said—the readers of Ruskin are charmed, inspired, more than convinced. (He is a moralist, an evangelist —not a philosopher or a man of science.) But the union of marvellous literary power, with encyclopædic studies of Nature and of Art, both illumined with burning enthusiasm as to all things moral and social, combined to form one of the most fascinating personalities of the nineteenth century.

The man himself issued a mass of biographical matter, full of naïveté, candour, and charm. And as many biographies of him already exist, together with scores of studies of his work and influence both in English and in various European languages, it might be thought that no need remained for any fresh biography of any kind. But the extant materials for a biography are so voluminous, so dispersive, and often so much entangled with other matter, that it is believed there is still room for a plain volume such as this, which would condense the story in accessible form and denote his place in English literature. And the directors of this series could not venture to omit a Man of Letters who was one of the greatest masters of prose in English literature, and one of the dominant influences of the Victorian epoch.

I have been asked to undertake the task, which with real hesitation I accept. Though an ardent admirer of the moral, social, and artistic ideals of John Ruskin myself, I am sworn in as a disciple of a very different

school, and of a master whom he often denounced. As a humble lover of his magnificent power of language, I have studied it too closely not to feel all its vices, extravagances, and temptations. I am neither Socialist nor Plutonomist; and so I can feel deep sympathy for his onslaught on our modern life, whilst I am far from accepting his trenchant remedies. I had abundant means for judging his beautiful nature and his really saintly virtues, for my personal acquaintance with him extended over forty years. I remember him in 1860 at Denmark Hill, in the lifetime of both his parents, and in the heyday of his fame and his power. I saw him and heard him lecture from time to time, received letters from him, and engaged in some controversies with him, both public and private. I was his colleague as a teacher at the Working Men's College and as a member of the Metaphysical Society. And towards the close of his life I visited him at Brantwood, and watched, with love and pain, the latest flickering of his indomitable spirit. If admiration, affection, common ideals, aims, and sympathies, can qualify one who has been bred in other worlds of belief and hope to judge fairly the life-work of a brilliant and noble genius, then I may presume to tell all I knew and all I have felt of the "Oxford graduate" of 1842, who was laid to rest in Coniston Churchyard in 1900.

John Ruskin, born in London, was a Scot of the Scots, his father and his mother being grandchildren of one John Ruskin of Edinburgh. Both parents and he himself passed much of their early life in Scotland, where he had many Scotch cousins, and whence he

ultimately took a Scotch wife. He talked with a Lowland accent, and his dominant tone of mind was a mysterious amalgam of John Knox, Carlyle, and Walter Scott.

Though the author of *Præterita* assures us that he knows next to nothing of his ancestry, and enlarges with delightful, and perhaps somewhat studied candour, about some worthy but humble relations, one family being that of a tanner at Perth, and the other the keeper of an inn at Croydon, the curiosity of his friends and relations has discovered a very honourable descent for this Socialist Cavalier. His paternal grandmother is traced back to the Adairs of South Galloway, a race said to be originally Gallgaedhel, Vikings of mixed Celtic and Scandinavian blood, and to the Agnews, a Norman stock settled in North Galloway. John Adair, the Laird of Little Genoch, married Mary Agnew, a near kinswoman of the famous soldier, Sir Andrew Agnew of Lochnaw, hereditary sheriff of Galloway, and the hero of Dettingen. Their son, Captain Thomas Adair, of Little Genoch, married Jean Ross, of Balsarroch, great-aunt of Sir John Ross, the Arctic explorer, of Sir Hew Dalrymple and of Field Marshal Sir Hew Dalrymple Ross. Catherine, daughter of Captain Adair and Jean Ross, married the Reverend James Tweddale of Glenluce; and their daughter, Catherine, married John Ruskin of Edinburgh, grandfather of the author. This James Tweddale of Glenluce, of an old family of Covenanters, was the holder of the original Covenant, confided to his care by Baillie of Jerviswood when on his way to death in the persecution. And from the same James Tweddale of Glenluce is descended Joan Ruskin

Agnew, now Mrs. Arthur Severn, a daughter of George Agnew, hereditary Sheriff-Clerk of Wigtown.

All this seems to have been unknown to our author, but it is put forth with full particulars in the *Life* compiled by his own secretary under the care of the family. And if it failed to interest John Ruskin himself, it may furnish a mine of conjectures and inferences of hereditary and race influence, when we start with a family tree which embraces Vikings, Norman knights, Gaelic chiefs, hereditary sheriffs of Galloway, famous soldiers, admirals, explorers, Covenanting ministers, Puritans, and doctors — men who, in civilian and martial office, appear in the history of our country. It is a genealogy in which Sir Walter Scott would have revelled, and may serve to explain the passion of Ruskin for Scott and his gallery of characters. And it is indeed somewhat curious that in his *Autobiography* our author dilates with a sort of inverted pride on the career of his mother, Margaret Cox, the daughter of a Yarmouth seaman, and of the landlady of the *King's Head* at Croydon; of his aunt, the wife of the baker of Croydon; and of his other aunt, the wife of the tanner of Perth. But we may remember that an indefatigable reader of Scott would delight in this mixture of mediæval chivalry with the domestic simplicities of Perthshire and of Surrey.

Be this as it may, as the heralds say, and whether the Ruskins were originally Erskines, or Roskeens, or Rogerkins, or Roughskins, certain it is, or seems to be, that John Ruskin, the grandfather, a handsome and daring youth of twenty, ran away in 1781 with Catherine Tweddale, a bright and brave girl of sixteen. They lived in the Old Town of Edinburgh,

where they entertained a cultivated society, and were intimate with Dr. Thomas Brown, the metaphysician, and other people of mark and position. Their only son, John James Ruskin, born in 1785, was sent to the High School of Edinburgh under Dr. Adam, and had a thorough classical education.

Early in the century, John James Ruskin, then aged twenty-two, having finished his education at Edinburgh, and furnished with good advice by Dr. Thomas Brown, who regarded him as a man of much promise, went up to London and engaged himself as a clerk in the wine trade in the famous firm of Sir W. Gordon, Murphy and Co Here he made his mark, and impressed so strongly his fellow-clerk, Mr. Peter Domecq, the owner of most valuable vineyards at Macharnudo, in Spain, the centre of the sherry trade, that it was agreed to form a new partnership. Ruskin, Telford, and Domecq was the new firm, founded in 1809, wherein Domecq was owner of the rich Spanish vineyard, Telford contributed the money capital, and Ruskin was senior partner and responsible head. No business house could have more congenial partners, a more solid basis, and more efficient management.

It was otherwise with the affairs of John Ruskin, the grandfather, who was also in a wine business in Edinburgh. "More magnificent in his expenditure than mindful of his family," as his son wrote long years afterwards, "indiscriminate and boundless in his hospitalities," the elder John Ruskin ruined his health and lost his fortune, and died about 1812 deeply in debt. John James Ruskin, his son, toiled in London to pay off his father's debts, worked his firm's business practically himself, undertook the correspondence,

directed the growths of sherry, and the importation from time to time, and ultimately founded a very considerable fortune. By nine years of assiduous work he paid off the debts of his father, secured a competence for himself, and became, as his son wrote on his tombstone, "an entirely honest merchant." At last he felt himself in a position to marry the woman whom years before he had asked to be his wife.

Margaret Cox, first cousin of John James, was the daughter of John Ruskin's sister by Captain Cox, a master mariner in the herring trade, whose widow maintained herself by keeping the *King's Head* at Croydon. The girl was brought up at the Croydon day-school, tall and handsome, able and resolute, a model housekeeper and a severe Bible Christian. She was four years older than John James, and at the age of twenty had been sent for to Scotland to keep house for John Ruskin's widow, where she became the counsellor and friend of her young cousin. After nine years of toil and of waiting, John James went up to Edinburgh, claimed his bride, overcame her remaining doubts, and they were married February 1818, very quietly and almost secretly, and came up to London. There, at 54 Hunter Street, Brunswick Square, on 8th February 1819, our famous writer was born.

It is, perhaps, not idle to dwell on all the various strains of heredity which may have influenced the nature of this remarkable child; and those who love to trace the marks of ancestry in the offspring may have unusual ground for it in this case. John Ruskin was an only child, the son of parents themselves first cousins, who were of set character and no longer young

at his birth. He lived with his parents continuously until their deaths, at the ages respectively of seventy-nine and ninety. It is rare that any son is so absolutely home-bred, home-reared, and nursed till long past middle life by parents of indomitable will, who devoted their whole lives to the single object of making the most of their wonderful child, according to their own lights. Few brains and few characters have been more profoundly influenced by the circumstances, accidents, and bonds of their family life. The father was a man of singular prudence, patience, practical talent, conventional views of life, and fine taste. The mother was a woman of great power, indomitable will, harsh nature, and an almost saturnine religion. His grandfather Ruskin was a jovial and reckless spendthrift; his grandfather Cox was a seaman who was killed by an accident in riding. His grandmother Ruskin was a brave high-spirited woman, who made a runaway match at sixteen; his grandmother Cox was an industrious keeper of an inn. The family tree contains stern Covenanters, dashing soldiers, prudent men of trade, and proud West country lairds. Who could have imagined that the child of these canny, reckless, stern, jovial men of pleasure, men of conscience, and men of toil—of these plodding tradesmen and of these daring spirits—would be the author of *Modern Painters*, of *Fors*, and *Unto this Last*? The fascination of pedigree-hunting no doubt lies in its inscrutable conundrums.

The infancy of the child has been told with curious simplicity by the author himself; and the early reminiscences in *Præterita* and *Fors* are an almost unique revelation of the childhood of a man of genius, narrated

by a master of expression and subtle humour. It was a home of narrow conventionalities, severe order, and indefatigable care—almost gloomy in its rigid rules, and sternly exclusive of the world without. The infant was often whipped, was not allowed any pretty toys, was surrounded by things forbidden, and was forced to read the Bible aloud day by day. From infancy to manhood he had to read two or three chapters word by word to his mother, with all the genealogies and hard names, not omitting the grossness of phrase. And to this daily reading of the Bible he very justly attributes his power of taking pains and "the best part of his taste in literature." He constantly and most rightly insists on this point. And perhaps only those who from early life have been saturated with the grand music of Scripture can quite understand what a matchless education in language this habit can become to a serious nature and a sensitive ear.

Pope's *Homer* and Walter Scott were also "his chosen masters," whom he read as soon as he could read at all, and as often as he could get a chance. On Sundays he had *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Pilgrim's Progress*. And somewhat later his father read aloud to him Shakespeare, Byron, Don Quixote, and Pope; and these, being a man of sound training and fine taste, he read with great spirit and true effect. This marvellous child taught himself, by the age of four or five, to read and to write—learning to read by whole sentences, and not by letters or syllables, and to write by copying print, "as other children draw dogs and horses." This is no family legend, since we have in the *Autobiography* a dated facsimile of the child's composition at the age of seven, with a drawing

of a mountain road. The passage is a long description of a cloud which, by his "electrical apparatus," the boy Harry proves to be charged with positive electricity, and he illustrates this by an allusion to the witch of the Alps standing in the rainbow in *Manfred*. It is rare to have such formal evidence of precocity in childhood, showing correct spelling and skilful writing, literary expression, scientific interest, and exact observation of nature. We need not wonder if the parents of this *enfant de miracle* thought themselves blessed by Heaven with an infant Samuel.

Præterita affords us a real piece of psychology, as it minutely describes how the child would gaze on the pattern of a carpet, count the bricks on a wall, wonder at the eddies of the Tay, "clear-brown over the pebbles," or would watch the sea-waves hour by hour, or "the rivulets in which the sand danced and minnows darted above the springs of Wandel." Though born in London, the child at the age of four was moved with the family to Herne Hill, "a rustic eminence" a few miles south of the city. Thence there was a view of the Norwood Hills, of Harrow and Windsor. From his earliest days, he was taken by his father in his annual drives on business to the north of England, and even to the Lakes and to Scotland, where he usually stayed with his aunt and cousins in Perth. In their driving tours, to visit customers and collect orders for sherry, the elder Ruskin, who had a cultivated taste in art, took the party to visit castles, cathedrals, ruined abbeys, colleges, parks, country mansions, and picture galleries, in which the boy, full of Scott's romances and passionately fond of landscapes, nursed his chivalrous fancies, and drank in beauty at every step. The child

"lisped in" *Modern Painters* from his Scotch nurse's arms.

At the age of four he was painted by Northcote, R.A. The picture of a chubby child in white frock with blue sash now hangs in the dining-room at Brantwood. His mother's birch discipline had taught him to sit quite still; and when the painter, pleased by his patience, asked what he would like as a background, he replied, "Blue hills"—the hills he had seen from Perth—of which old Anne used to sing—

"Her barefooted lassies and mountains so blue."

Even before that age he preached a sermon: "People be dood. If you are dood, Dod will love you; if you are not dood, Dod will not love you. People be dood." His first letter bears a postmark which shows that it was written when he was just turned four. It is correct and natural. He complains that his uncle and aunt put up the pillars of his new box of bricks "upside down. Instead of a book bring me a whip, coloured red and black. To-morrow is Sabbath—I would like you to come home. My kiss and my love"; and so on. In all these reminiscences and relics we may see indications of that indefatigable love of nature and of art, of mountains and rivers—the born evangelist and hot-gospeller, the positive critic with his rationale of building, and the literary lash of brilliant device—Calvinism, self-will, and deep affection. Verily the child is father of the man!

At the age of seven he began to compose original pieces, with illustrations of his own. "Harry and Lucy concluded—being the last Part of *Early Lessons* in four volumes—vol. i., with copper plates printed

and composed by a little boy, and also drawn"—such is the ambitious, characteristic, veracious title-page of this work, of which but one part and a quarter was completed. From the age of seven he began to write poems, a practice which he kept up constantly till he left Oxford; and at nine he composed a poem entitled "Eudosia: a Poem on the Universe." It was in that stage that he began to lead, he tells us, "a very small, perky, contented, conceited Cock-Robinson-Crusoe sort of life, in the central point which it appeared to me that I occupied in the universe." Such was the very natural result to a child of genius, nursed, stimulated, petted, and isolated from the world outside.

In a passage of curious and pathetic introspection, the author himself analyses the good and evil of the system on which he was brought up—"the maternal installation" of his mind. At the age of seven, he says, he had been irrevocably impressed with a perfect understanding of three priceless gifts—Peace, Obedience, and Faith. To these moral lessons he adds the habit of fixed attention in eyes and in mind, and an extreme delicacy of the bodily senses, due to strict home discipline. But these good things were mixed with severe "calamities." First, he had nothing to love. His parents were no more loved than the sun and the moon; they were visible powers of nature to him." Nor did he love God. He had no companions, no one to assist or to thank. Secondly, he had nothing to endure: no danger, no pain was suffered to come near him; "his strength was not exercised, his patience never tried, and his courage never fortified." Thirdly, he was taught no manners; shyness grew on him; he obtained no skill in any accomplishment, nor ease and

tact in behaviour. Lastly and chief of evils, his judgment was left undeveloped—"the bridle and blinkers were never taken off him." It is a true, if slightly overdrawn, sketch, most melancholy to read—how a child, marvellously sensitive and preternaturally precocious, was nursed and swaddled, and isolated from the buffets of the outside world and from society with human beings, and almost forced by parental affection and authority to regard its little self as a sublime genius destined to reform, inform, and direct the world. And withal, this nursing and this detachment created the daring critic and the impassioned priest of pure Nature and man's highest good. His mother, he tells us, like Hannah, "had devoted him to God before he was born."

No method of life could have been devised so favourable to bring out close attention to natural objects, the cultivation of original ideas, and practical study of literature. The baby spent his first summers in the country, was left to toddle about in a garden, and in his fourth year was taken to Scotland, of course by road. There he used to play in a garden leading down to the Tay; or again in Surrey, on the banks of Wandel. He saw as an infant, he says, all the high-roads and most of the cross-roads in England and Wales, and as far as Perth, and nearly all the noblemen's houses in England. What powers of imagination he possessed, he says, either fastened themselves on inanimate things or soared into regions of romance. He could remember no time in his life when the novels of Walter Scott were not familiar to him. He had hardly any books to read except the Bible and Pope's *Homer*, Scott, and the great poets. Much of his time

was taken up in the watching of the ways of plants, or in poring over minerals and specimens of rocks. "By the swirls of smooth blackness, broken by no fleck of foam, where Tay gathereth herself like Medusa, I never passed without awe," he writes. He learned to copy drawings as a child. But he could never draw anything "out of his head"—without a copy. And he always declares that he never could compose any drawing of any kind.

From the age of seven he was constantly occupied in original composition. He made a systematic diary of his tours, and as often as not these experiences were thrown into verse. Thousands of such lines are extant, portions of which may be seen in the two volumes of *Poems*. At the age of ten (May 1829) he presented his father with an original work of his own—"Battle of Waterloo: A Play in two Acts, with other small Poems." Wellington and Bonaparte perorate, and a chorus describes the procession of triumph. Comparing the Pyramids with Skiddaw, he writes—

> "The touch of man
> Raised pigmy mountains, but gigantic tombs.
> The touch of Nature raised the mountain's brow."

A boy who could write and think like that when he was ten was fully qualified to profit by the continual journeys on which he was taken. In reading his own memoirs and the story of his family, it seems as if their lives were passed in perpetual travelling. Not only was the boy taken every year long journeys in a post-chaise on the business visits to every part of England, but even to the Continent. At five he was taken to Keswick. At six to Paris, Brussels, and Waterloo. At seven again to Perthshire. At fourteen he was

taken through Flanders, along the Rhine, through the Black Forest to Switzerland. It was then that he first drank in his life-long passion for the Alps. He describes, in a delightful episode in *Præterita*, his first sight of the Alps from Schaffhausen. His youth, in fact, was one constant tour in search of beautiful scenes and romantic spots. His love of Nature was developed far earlier than his love of art; and through life it remained to him a far deeper joy and a more congenial study. His interest in the great Italian art came to him indeed curiously late, and in somewhat doubtful ways. And to the last he speaks of his own understanding of Italian art, whether painting, sculpture, or architecture, with somewhat less of that pride and sureness which mark his sense of Nature's beauty and her mysteries.

A boy so precocious and sensitive, who was saturated with the love of Nature, and also with the masterpieces in poetry and prose, needed no pedagogic direction. And, as is usual in such cases, what pedagogic instruction he had was, perhaps, rather a hindrance than a help. At the age of eleven he was taught some Latin, and less Greek, by Dr. Andrews, a genial but somewhat desultory scholar, who never "grounded" the incorrigible lad as he might have been grounded at a regular school. Mr. Runciman was engaged as his drawing-master, who, at any rate, taught him perspective. At twelve the boy was taught a little French and some useful geometry by Mr. Rowbotham, of whom the young genius wearied as a dull and plodding pedagogue. At fifteen the boy was sent to the day-school of the Reverend Thomas Dale at Peckham. Here he was in a rather broken course for two years,

at the end of which time he was pronounced "shaky" in scholarship. He also attended lectures at King's College, London, for three days a week in logic, English literature, and translation. At the age of seventeen he was matriculated at Oxford; and as it was doubtful if he could pass the ordinary examination, he was allowed to enter Christ Church as a gentleman-commoner.

No doubt can remain that when John went to Oxford at the age of eighteen, his school teaching had been desultory, and his schoolboy knowledge was poor. He assures us that he never learned to write Latin prose, and with difficulty managed the regulation Latin verse. He knew the elements of Euclid well, and some algebra. He had read little in the ancient classics, and had but a smattering of French. On the other hand, he had taught himself and had picked up a good deal of general knowledge in elementary physics, and had passionately devoted himself to geology, botany, and minerals, in his own way. He had worked at museums and made collections of his own, which he carefully catalogued. Besides this, he had seen at eighteen more of England and of the Continent than most systematic tourists, and had observed and thought about all this perhaps more than any living man. He had, no doubt, written more prose and verse than has been recorded of any man of his years; and he had made himself an indefatigable student of composition, an art which from infancy he had practised with zeal and untiring patience.

With much nervous energy and a lively temper, the young John was delicate, and his parents behaved as

if his life could only be saved by unremitting care. The family records are perpetually interrupted by illness. At eight he had a serious attack of fever in Scotland. At sixteen he was in great danger for some days with pleurisy, and had to be taken away from Mr. Dale's school. At twenty-one he was attacked with spitting of blood, and had to be removed from Oxford for a whole year and a half. But he was no permanent invalid; in health, a very good walker, full of activity and high spirits, and always an ardent worker, whose eyes and pen seldom ceased night or day. But he learned no boyish games, never attempted to dance, and after repeated efforts at a riding school could not be taught to sit a horse.

We need not take quite literally all the confessions in *Præterita*; but there can be little doubt that the young Ruskin had been brought up in an abnormal way in a family which practised a sort of *égoïsme-à-trois*, as if it were a law of God and man. He himself calls it "our regular and sweetly selfish manner of living." Again, "It was at once too formal and too luxurious." He says he was "a conceited and troublesome little monkey"—"he was safe against ridicule in his conceit." In these Confessions of his, which in all their literary charm and in their pure simplicity may be contrasted with those of Rousseau—and they are nearly as frank and outspoken—we see how the old man could judge severely the errors of his youth, and even analyse the foibles and mistakes of his parents. But we must not forget all the evidence he accumulates of the indulgent fondness of his father and the iron devotion of his mother, all his own tenderness of affection, wherever love was open to him. Nor must

we forget that conceit was almost inevitable to one of such marvellous precocity, having so many of the rarest gifts of sense and of brain, morbidly imprisoned in a very small circle, where he was treated almost as if he were a being of another order with a direct mandate from on high. And this desultory education, with incessant touring and indefatigable description of all he saw, was the ideal method by which was produced the evangelist of Nature and Art and the consummate master of language, whilst it made it impossible that he should become either a consistent thinker or a rational reformer of the modern world.

CHAPTER II

FIRST LITERARY EFFORTS

It is time to give some connected account of the young Ruskin's pieces earlier than the first volume of *Modern Painters* which appeared in 1843 (when he was twenty-four). He wrote both prose and verse almost from the nursery. But as his early poetry surpasses in quantity and in merit his earliest prose, and as he ceased to write verses on leaving Oxford, it will be best to begin with the poetry. Poetry, in the true and high sense of the term, as we apply it to Shelley, or Tennyson, or Arnold, John Ruskin never did achieve. In the two volumes which contain selected pieces, and where we may see some fourteen thousand lines, it would be difficult to find a single poem, perhaps even a stanza, that rises above very good work of the "minor poet." One striking fact is that almost all the poems are descriptions of scenery and places, which hardly any one but Byron has ever made interesting. Another curious fact is that the early poems are the most spontaneous and the best, the very early ones amazing in their precocious facility. A third point is that they display no quality of Ruskin's individual mind and literary power. The rhythm is correct, easy, and cultivated; the form taken from the best models; the phrasing pure, graceful, and picturesque; and yet

the poem as a piece leaves no definite impression on the mind. Thought is overborne in clouds of refined language; poetry exhales in exuberant local colour. And yet as a study of literary evolution, the two volumes of poetry cannot be neglected.

Authentic fragments of the child's verses have been preserved from the age of seven. Even at that age, when few children can write or spell, there are bits which are perfectly correct in rhythm and phrase, and invariably accurate rhymes. Of a steam-engine employed in a mine he says—

> "When furious up from mines the water pours,
> And clears from rusty moisture all the ores."

He corrects (at seven) the ignorant people who cannot enumerate the colours of the rainbow—

> "But those that do not know about that light
> Reflect not on it; and in all that light
> Not one of all the colours do they know."

The infant John could, at seven, patter off the colours in their right order!

Again he apostrophises a Scotch glen—in a strain of Wordsworthian moralising on the analogies of mountain scenery and human life—

> "Glen of Glenfarg, thy beauteous rill,
> Streaming through thy mountains high,
> Onward pressing, onward still,
> Hardly seeing the blue sky.
>
> "Mountain streams, press on your way,
> And run into the stream below:
> Never stop like idle clay,—
> Hear the sheep and cattle low."

A babe who thought and wrote like this at seven seemed destined either for a premature death or immortality on earth.

Of Glenfarg, at the age of eight, he writes—

> "Those dropping waters that come from the rocks,
> And many a hole, like the haunt of a fox;
> That silvery stream that runs babbling along,
> Making a murmuring, dancing song."

At nine this miraculous infant thus addressed Skiddaw:—

> "Skiddaw, upon thy heights the sun shines bright,
> But only for a moment; then gives place
> Unto a playful cloud which on thy brow
> Sports wantonly,—then floats away in air,—
> Throwing its shadow on thy towering height;
> And, darkening for a moment thy green side,
> But adds unto its beauty, as it makes
> The sun more bright when it again appears.
> Thus in the morning on thy brow these clouds
> Rest as upon a couch, and give vain scope
> For fancy's play. And airy fortresses,
> And towers, and battlements, and all appear
> Chasing the others off, and in their turn
> Are chasèd by the others.
> . . . . .
> save where the snow
> (The fleecy locks of winter) falls around
> And forms a white tomb for the careless swain
> Who wanders far from home, and meets his death
> Amidst the cold of winter."

We might pick out of the *Excursion* many a duller passage than this; and it would not be easy to pick a single passage that would show the same precise and minute watching of the clouds on a mountain, as

with the eye of the painter—the same pictorial distinctness.

There is nothing better in the two volumes of poetry than this piece on Skiddaw composed at the age of nine. The marvel is that at ten or twelve ("The Fairies"; "The Eternal Hills," 1831) the boy Johnny wrote poetry entirely equal to good average University prize poems; with that tedious facility, the imitative trick, the correct and measured rhythm which mark that form of composition. He could copy Pope, Scott, Byron, Wordsworth—even Shelley—as well as a good oleograph can copy an original Turner. There is hardly a fault in metre, a crudity, an extravagance, or a cacophony in all these boy's exercises. He never did any better—even at sixty. And the verses show nothing of his power except the keen observation of nature and the delicate feeling; but none of the exuberance, passion, eloquence of his prose writing from the first. Why a grand but tempestuous master of prose for twelve years continued to indite whole volumes of mellifluous but rather commonplace verse must always rank as one of the curiosities of literature.

Many a prize poem has had worse couplets in the Papist vein than these on Etna—

> "Then Etna from his burning crater pours
> A fiery torrent o'er Sicilia's shores.
> While, from the crater, gaseous vapours rise;
> Volcanic lightnings flash along the skies;
> Earth gapes again; Catania's city falls,
> And all her people die within her walls."

This is dated 25th October 1829 (*aetat.* 10).

At the age of twelve he wrote *The Iteriad*—a long poem in three books, a versified journal of a tour in

the Lakes. Six or seven hundred lines have been printed, of which the following is a specimen:—

"Where the pikes of Sca-fell rose so haughty and proud,
While its battlements lofty looked down on the cloud,—
While its sides with ravines and dark chasms were riven,—
That huge mountain-wall seemed upholding the heaven!"

He had now begun to read Byron, and was caught with the ring of the *Hours of Idleness*.

At the age of fourteen (May 1833) he wrote a verse diary of a tour on the Continent from Calais to Genoa. Twenty-eight of these pieces have been published. They are in imitation of Scott's *Lady of the Lake*. Some of them were published in *Friendship's Offering*, and were quite as good as the pieces usually printed in that annual. At St. Goar on the Rhine he says—

"No marvel that the spell-bound Rhine,
Like giant overcome with wine,
Should *here* relax his angry frown,
And, soothed to slumber, lay him down
Amid the vine-clad banks that lave
Their tresses in his placid wave."

There are many tamer bits in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

At sixteen he versified his diary of a tour through France to Chamouni, 1835, which he tells us was "in the style of *Don Juan*, artfully combined with that of *Childe Harold*"—wherein the imitation of the second was more successful than that of the first—though the Byronic rhymes are not bad; *e.g.* "the place where old Tom Becket is" rhymes to "similar antiquities."

At seventeen his first love affair inspires not a few

pieces, but it adds nothing either to the vigour or merit of his poems. The verses "To Adèle" hardly rise above the level of average amatory poems. The three long poems written for the Newdigate Prize at Oxford, 1837, 1838, 1839, at the age of eighteen, nineteen, and twenty, are all simply very good academic exercises quite up to the best Oxford standard. In his first trial he was beaten by Dean Stanley; but in 1839 he won the prize with "Salsette and Elephanta." This piece may perhaps rank with the first class of the Newdigates, and it is an almost servile imitation of that ancient type:—

> "'Tis eve, and o'er the face of parting day
> Quick smiles of summer lightning flit and play;
> In pulses of broad light, less seen than felt,
> They mix in heaven, and on the mountains melt!"

and so on and so on—

> "O'er thy dark sands, majestic Dharavee;—
> And pause above Canarah's haunted steep;—
> The Indian maiden, through the scented grove
> Seeks the dim shore, and lights the lamp of love."

After that, of course, breezes stir the peepul's sacred shade. Presently we are introduced to Brahma's painless brow—and Veeshnu's guardian smile. And at last India is converted. She

> "Deserts the darkened path her fathers trod,
> And seeks redemption from the Incarnate God."

All this is strictly in accordance with the programme of a prize poem which Goldwin Smith is said to have given a friend, whose subject was "The Stuarts"—"The Stuarts will never be restored—The Jews will—

Salem!" The other pieces written in the Oxford period, some of which were published at the time, are quite on the level of good occasional poetry, but are nothing more. And as they were composed by an adult at an age when many cultivated men have written poetry as good, they have no special interest or value. They are graceful, correct, melodious pieces; but they fail to rouse us, they have no real distinction, no strong grip. They do not even interest us, as the boyish effusions do from their precocious maturity.

To turn now to the earliest prose. He wrote clearly and spelled correctly in 1823, at the age of four. From the age of seven he wrote up his diary regularly, with accurate descriptions of the places he visited. In "Harry and Lucy" he writes thus: "Harry ran for an electrical apparatus which his father had given him, and the cloud electrified his apparatus positively. After that another cloud came which electrified his apparatus negatively, and then a long train of smaller ones." All this is spelled accurately, and is written in printed letters; and in the same book are given a multitude of observations of physical phenomena. At the age of thirteen he wrote letters which are perfectly correct, easy, and flowing.

His first printed pieces appeared, when he was fifteen, in Loudon's *Magazine of Natural History*, 1834. This contained an essay on the geologic strata of Mont Blanc, a Note on the perforation of a leaden pipe by rats, and inquiries into the causes of the colour of Rhine-water. In 1835 the annual *Friendship's Offering*, published by Smith, Elder and Company, printed three of his poems on German scenes. Loudon's *Magazine*

also published, in 1836, essays of his on "The Induration of Sandstone" and "Observations on the Temperature of Spring and River Water." When *Blackwood's Magazine*, in 1836, made an attack on Turner's pictures of the year, the young art critic dashed off an answer in defence of the painter. The essay was not sent direct to the editor of *Blackwood*, but was submitted to Turner himself, who expressed his own contempt of the critics, and sent the essay, not to the *Magazine*, but to the purchaser of his picture —the subject of which is "Juliet at Venice."

The piece has been preserved in manuscript; and it is so entirely Ruskinian in its enthusiasm, its love of nature, and also in its redundancies, is so truly a fore-word to *Modern Painters*, being dated at his age of seventeen, that a bit of it deserves to be quoted:—

"His imagination is Shakespearian in its mightiness. . . . Many-coloured mists are floating above the distant city; but such mists as you might imagine to be ethereal spirits, souls of the mighty dead breathed out of the tombs of Italy into the blue of her bright heaven, and wandering in vague and infinite glory around the earth that they have loved. Instinct with the beauty of uncertain light, they move and mingle among the pale stars, and rise up into the brightness of the illimitable heaven, whose soft, sad blue eye gazes down into the deep waters of the sea for ever—that sea whose motionless and silent transparency is beaming with phosphor light, that emanates out of its sapphire serenity like bright dreams breathed into the spirit of a deep sleep. And the spires of the glorious city rise indistinctly bright into those living mists like pyramids of pale fire from some vast altar; and amidst the glory of the dream there is, as it were, the voice of a multitude entering by the eye, arising from the stillness of the city like the summer wind passing over the leaves of the forest when a murmur is heard amidst their multitudes."

All this is certainly *trop de choses*—too full of images, clouds, glories, and serenities which tumble over each other, and read too much like a vulgar parody of those *purpurei panni* of the *Seven Lamps* that the author so bitterly regretted. But one sees how, seven years later, all this might become the germ of *Modern Painters*. In 1837, at the age of eighteen, he contributed a series of papers to Loudon's *Architectural Magazine*. These were entitled "The Poetry of Architecture; or the Architecture of the Nations of Europe considered in its Association with Natural Scenery and National Character." As he wrote afterwards: "I could not have put in fewer, or more inclusive words, the definition of what half my future life was to be spent in discoursing of; while the *nom de plume* I chose, 'According to Nature,' was equally expressive of the temper in which I was to discourse alike on that and every other subject." The papers were signed "Kata Phusin." "These youthful essays," he adds, "though deformed by assumption, and shallow in contents, are curiously right up to the points they reach." They contained a good deal of classical allusion, and were believed to be written by an Oxford don.

The following year (1838) he engaged in a controversy on "The Convergence of Perpendiculars" in painting—on which he wrote five papers in answer to Mr. Parsey. Mr. Arthur Parsey had attempted by optics to upset the conventional scheme of perspective. "Kata Phusin" replied that in practice the field of vision in a picture is so limited that the geometric aberration may be disregarded. The young critic's knowledge of Optics was not quite sufficient to enable him to master the whole truth; but he was

right in defending the current practice as that which the human eye appears to see in the given position.

About the same time Ruskin wrote a long essay for a young lady on "The Comparative Advantages of the Studies of Music and Painting," wherein he places painting above music as a means of education, though he gives to music a greater power of stirring emotion; but, curiously enough, he adds that its power is strongest in proportion as the art is diminished.

A remarkable proof of the effect on public opinion being wrought by the first appearance of the young critic was afforded when the Edinburgh committee were considering the form of the Scott Memorial. A writer in the *Architectural Magazine* asked for the opinion of "Kata Phusin" as one of considerable importance. So challenged, "Kata Phusin" replied in a paper in the *Magazine* (January 1839): "Whether Works of Art may, with propriety, be combined with the sublimity of Nature; and what would be the most appropriate situation for the proposed Monument to the Memory of Sir Walter Scott in Edinburgh." After much inquiry, he rather prefers a colossal monument of Scott to be placed on Salisbury Crags. The committee did not adopt his view, and perhaps Auld Reekie would not have been pleased if they had.

During this discussion the publisher Loudon himself wrote to the father this remarkable and prophetic passage (November 30, 1838): "Your son is certainly the greatest natural genius that ever it has been my fortune to become acquainted with; and I cannot but feel proud to think that at some future period, when

both you and I are under the turf, it will be stated in the literary history of your son's life that the first article of his which was published was in Loudon's *Magazine of Natural History.*"

Would that every young genius of nineteen could find a publisher so generous and so full of insight!

CHAPTER III

LOVE—OXFORD—TURNER

NATURALLY, the romantic young poet of seventeen fell in love. In the year 1836 M. Domecq brought his four younger daughters to England to stay with the Ruskins at Herne Hill. They lived in good society in Paris, and all eventually married into French families of title. John fell deeply in love with Adèle, the eldest of the four, then fifteen, an elegant, gay, and beautiful girl. He has himself told us the story with infinite grace and pathos. The four beautiful girls—an apparition of fairydom to the raw "convent-bred" lad, as he calls himself, reduced him to a heap of white ashes in four days. "But the *Mercredi des Cendres* lasted four years," and darkened his early life.

Clotilde, he says, as her sisters called her, but Adèle to him, because this rhymed to shell, spell, and knell,

"was only made more resplendent by the circlet of her sisters' beauty; while my own shyness and unpresentableness were further stiffened, or rather sanded, by a patriotic and Protestant conceit which was tempered neither by politeness nor sympathy; so that, while in company I sate jealously miserable like a stock fish (in truth, I imagine, looking like nothing so much as a skate in an aquarium trying to get up the glass), on any blessed occasion of *tête-à-tête*, I endeavoured to entertain my Spanish-born, Paris-bred, and Catholic-hearted

mistress with my own views upon the subjects of the Spanish Armada, the Battle of Waterloo, and the doctrine of Transubstantiation."

So, after fifty years, the lady being long married and dead, the old lover can recount his feelings; but it is certain that they were very real at the time and deeply influenced his health and his career. The two fathers quite contemplated marriage—which Mrs. Ruskin, as a severe Calvinist, looked on as horrible and impossible. The boy, of course, resorted to poetry. He began with "Leoni: A Romance of Italy," a story of Naples, where the bandit Leoni represents some sanguinary and adventurous being, and Giuletta the perfections of his mistress. It was even printed in *Friendship's Offering*, and is a curiously clever imitation of Byron—

> "I do not ask a tear; but while
> I linger where I must not stay,
> Oh! give me but a parting smile,
> To light me on my lonely way."

Adèle not only smiled, but "laughed over it in rippling ecstasies of derision, of which I bore the pain bravely, for the sake of seeing her thoroughly amused." Yes; it was the old story, when calf seventeen woos lambkin fifteen, as a greater poet than Johnny Ruskin knew. Then followed love poems, very good average pieces for a young poet, only remarkable for their precocious grace and polish, with even occasional touches of inspiration as this. Adèle has gone, and is spoken of in his hearing:—

> "Thy gentle name doth rend apart
> The clouds of the forgetful veil,
> That dims the heaven of my heart."

Then he tried a romantic tale, *Velasquez, the Novice*, and a play, *Marcolini*—a compound of Shakespeare and Byron—the scene Venice, the heroine an amalgam of Desdemona and Juliet, and the young Marcolini "such a man as angels love to look upon!"

> "All dazzled by the light of his own love,
> To see strange things i' the world.
> Such as—benevolence in misanthropes,
> Mercy in bravoes, justice in senators,
> And other such things incompatible!"

But his young Helena would not see all these amiabilities in our Herne Hill Marcolini. She even "laughed immensely" over a letter in French in seven quarto pages which he wrote to her in Paris about the solitudes of Herne Hill since she left it. Two years later, she was then seventeen, and John was nineteen, he saw her again in England; but she still laughed at him. M. Domecq died, and Adèle was engaged to the Baron Duquesne, a handsome and rich young noble. John wrote "Farewell," a long and very graceful poem in the vein of Shelley, which told

> "The grief my words were weak to tell,
> And thine unable to console."

It is a touching piece from the circumstances, and only just misses being a fine poem, by its perfection of grace and smoothness; and it is without a touch of repining, or bitterness, or even surprise. In a dream he sees how her smile wakes the night-flowers at her feet—

> "It fell on the cold rocks, and on the free
> Unfeeling waves,—oh! wherefore not on me?"

This comes very near indeed to poetry.

Adèle married Baron Duquesne in March 1840. They tried to keep the news from the lover, as he was now preparing for his degree at Oxford. He declares (fifty years later) that the news did not crush him so much as he had expected. But his health seemed to belie this assertion, for he was startled with indications of consumption. "Things were progressing smoothly in Paris, to the abyss" (*i.e.* to the marriage of Adèle Domecq), when one night a short cough brought blood into the mouth. Consultations of doctors ended in his being ordered abroad; the Dean postponed his degree, the wine-merchant left his business, and the whole party crossed the Continent and wintered in Rome. For nearly two years John was an invalid, aimlessly roving from place to place, and with mind as little settled to any definite point as was his body. The Duquesne marriage turned out happily. The Domecq family were all brought up to love and admire Ruskin's works, and to the last spoke of him with kindness. "Men capable of the highest imaginative passion," he writes in 1885, "are always tossed on fiery waves by it." And he consigns the memory of his "absurdity, pain, error, wasted affection," to the dust-heap of Oblivion. So be it! But with him we may wonder "what sort of a creature he would have turned out if Love had been with him instead of against him." *¿ Quien sabe ?*

Our author has told the story of his Oxford career with the same delightful naïveté, though we need not take too literally all the humours and confessions of *Præterita*. His father, convinced that his son was destined to be a bishop, quite resolved to put him in the best position, in the best college, in the best

university according to his own lights. And with all his prudence and good sense, such was the rigid aloofness of the whole Ruskinian world and its methods, that John James would often take a course both singular and unwise. Having resolved to enter his son at Christ Church, the old wine-merchant was so ill advised as to make the raw, shy lad a gentleman-commoner, where he was thrown into the immediate companionship of men of rank, wealth, and fashion. These young lords and squires who rode races, betted, shirked all work and got into scrapes, naturally regarded the queer poet as a butt rather than an equal. One of the survivors of their table in 1840 tells me that Ruskin was one of the gentlest creatures ever seen in Oxford, more like a girl than a man, who was looked on as a joke until a few men perceived his genius and the rest became aware of his goodness. His fine temper, his wit, his mastery of drawing, his skill in chess, his hospitality, and superb sherry, won over the young "bloods," who at last agreed to regard him as something quite of an order by himself. And before long he was admitted to the society of the best men of the college.

There he made the life-long friendship with (Sir) Henry Acland and (Dean) Liddell, (Sir) Charles Newton and Dr. Buckland, with whom he studied geology. His college tutors were the Rev. W. Brown and Osborne Gordon. At Dr. Buckland's he met Dr. Daubeny and Charles Darwin. "He and I got on together and talked all the evening." He was called up to read an essay in Hall, which he did with great effect, to the scandal of the gentleman-commoners who shirked essays and got their tasks done at 1s. 6d. a

sheet. On the third trial he won the Newdigate Verse Prize, with a poem which has been already described. It was the one University honour for which he seriously strove, and which he was proud to win. The House was pleased at his success; and even Dean Gaisford, the academic Bluebeard of the time, condescended to coach him in the parts of his poem which he should recite in the theatre. Those who care to see how a clever man may beat a man of genius may compare Dean Stanley's "Gipsies" with Ruskin's. Stanley was no more a poet than was Ruskin, and had not a tenth part of Ruskin's poetic spirit. But Stanley had the journalist's *flair* for hitting the taste of the day and appealing to the sentiments of his readers instead of expatiating on his own.

One of the most amazing episodes of this girl-undergraduate life was the resolution of his mother to come up to lodge in Oxford during term and to have John every evening to tea with her—the deserted father and husband coming up solemnly (by road of course) to spend Sunday. Marvellous to tell, neither John, nor his father, nor the College, nor the undergraduates, saw anything unusual in this proceeding, and he declares that it was not a source of chaff. But the whole story of his Oxford life must be read in his own *Præterita*, with its inimitable irony and waggery, and we must read *cum grano* his gentle play about his friends and himself.

John was examined for Little-go by Robert Lowe, who was "very kind." In fact, he worked steadily at the subjects of his course, though he came up feeling for them "not the slightest interest." It is clear that he read "his books" with care, and that his elementary

geometry was thoroughly good. In the end, after the terrible breakdown of his health, which sent him away from Oxford for a year and a half (1840-41), he did so well in his Final Examination that he received an honorary fourth class both in Classics and in Mathematics. A double honorary Fourth means that a man who seeks only the ordinary degree has the unsolicited honour conferred on him by the examiners in both schools. It is extremely rare, and it used to be said that it was equivalent to a Double First-class. It was the character of Ruskin to work thoroughly at everything he took in hand. To know "every syllable of his Thucydides," as he declares he did, was indeed scholarship in itself.

The sojourn of Mrs. Ruskin at Oxford, of which we are told the sole object was to watch over John's health, was in some sense justified when one night, in the spring of 1840, he was attacked with hemorrhage of the lungs, went round to his mother, who took him to London to consult physicians, and no doubt saved his life by insisting on the rest and foreign travel they ordered. The journey to Italy, except that he there made the acquaintance of Joseph Severn and George Richmond, did him little good, either physically or morally; and he was at last restored by a summer among the Alps and the dietary treatment at Leamington by Dr. Jephson. One of the most singular of the records in *Præterita* is the languid interest he took in the first sight of Italy, even of Florence, Siena, and Rome, where neither history, art, nor romance at all impressed him. No doubt his bad health affected his mental interests. On his recovery he worked hard with Osborne Gordon, passed his examination with

great credit, and received the degree of B.A. in May 1842.

It is difficult to estimate the value of Oxford to Ruskin. In his violently ironical way he says, "The whole time I was there, my mind was simply in the state of a squash before it is a peascod," and he speaks of his academic attainments with amused contempt. Oxford in the end deeply interested him, and as professor called forth some of his most ardent labours. After all, perhaps the Thucydides and the geometry were the most thorough bits of systematic study on regular lines that Ruskin ever made in his life. On the other hand, the curriculum then current, not excluding the Newdigate, the Latin prose, and the Greek syntax, drew him off at a critical time from his natural bent, and, along with love, wasted some of his best years. Ruskin was bound in any case to be miscellaneous in his impressions and desultory in his eagerness. Perhaps Oxford would have been to him a school of unmixed good if he had been able to form his own occupations and his own friendships apart from any degree work; if his fond parents had not expected him to win the highest honours and ultimately to blossom into a full-blown Bishop of the Church.

In a striking, perhaps morbid, passage in *Præterita* he records his feelings on finding himself at last through his Oxford course, with his powers in embryo, likings indulged rather against conscience, "and a dim sense of duty to myself, my parents, and a daily more vague shadow of Eternal Law." It is the usual lot of genius at twenty-two or three. At any rate, he gave up all idea of becoming a bishop, to the lasting grief

of his parents, and he flatly declined to enter the sherry trade. In a hazy way he now saw that his mission was to be a prose poet of Nature and of Art. And the outcome was, as usual, a journey of the whole family to the Alps again. He was prose poet of Nature first and foremost. Art came later, and was subordinate always. "Clouds and mountains have been life to me," he says. "The essential love of Nature in me," he adds, was the root of all he had become and the light of all he had learned. No one, he thinks, can have had such rapture as he has known from the mere sight of mountains. "They did not haunt me 'like a passion.' They were a passion." Two mountains he names "have had enormous influence on his whole life." The child of four who asked for "blue mountains" to his portrait, who at seven apostrophised Skiddaw, who on his first view of the Alps from Schaffhausen could feel his "destiny fixed in all of it that was to be sacred and useful,"[1] who at twenty-three had spent the best part of his life in studying nature, was inevitably destined to become the apostle of beautiful scenery to an age which Byron and Wordsworth had attuned to this passion, and to judge what painting had done to make us understand Nature.

Ruskin began to draw as a child, but always to copy to make a record of things he saw before him. At

[1] The present writer remembers his own first view of the Alps from Schaffhausen at the end of a hard day; and after some forty visits to the Alps cannot forget the emotion he felt at the sudden sight, nor can he ever see the eternal snows without a choking sensation in the throat. There is no homesickness, no patriotism, like that of the mountaineer.

ten he could copy Cruikshank's illustrations; but he never could compose an original design. In 1832, when thirteen, he made a successful drawing of Dulwich bridge, and was presented with a copy of Rogers's *Italy*, "which determined the main tenor of my life." The vignettes by Turner filled him with delight, and he set himself to imitate them as far as he could. As a boy Runciman was his first drawing-master; and in his sixteenth year he was promoted to study with Copley Fielding. At twenty-two he had lessons from Harding. At this time, just before taking his degree, he had drawn a bit of ivy round a thorn stem at Norwood, and this he often refers to as a revelation to him that exact truth and close acceptance of Nature was the basis of all real art.

When Turner, in Rogers's *Italy*, first burst on the sight of the boy Ruskin at the age of thirteen, like his first view of the Alps from Schaffhausen, he had never heard of the master, except that Runciman told him how "the world had been dazzled by some splendid ideas of the painter." In his seventeenth year Ruskin was roused to indignation, as we have seen, by *Blackwood's* attack on Turner as "out of nature," and the furious diatribe which he wrote in defence has only turned up since his death, for it has never been printed. "The review," he says, "raised me to the height of 'black anger,' in which I have remained pretty nearly ever since." In *Præterita*, Ruskin calls this essay "the first chapter of *Modern Painters*." In 1837 his father bought him his first Turner—the "Richmond, Surrey," which they both triumphed over as having "trees, architecture, water, a lovely sky, and a clustered bouquet of brilliant figures." The second Turner in

1839 was the "Gosport." On his twenty-first birthday for his rooms at Christ Church his father gave him the "Winchelsea." And he afterwards bought the "Slave Ship," "Harlech," and other pieces of the master. These were "the chief recreation of my fatigued hours." He had been, from his earliest recollections, a student of the Turners collected by Mr. Windus at Tottenham. This generous and admirable amateur (whom the present writer well remembers as a most courteous host) bought up all the drawings Turner made for the engravers, and gave Ruskin the run of his rooms at any time. "He was the means of my writing *Modern Painters*."

At last came "what the reader might suppose a principal event of my life"—John Ruskin was introduced to "the man who beyond all doubt is the greatest of the age"—the words are in the Diary under date 12th June 1840:—

> "I found him a somewhat eccentric, keen-mannered, matter-of-fact, English-minded gentleman; good-natured evidently, bad-tempered evidently, hating humbug of all sorts, shrewd, perhaps a little selfish, highly intellectual, the powers of the mind not brought out with any delight in their manifestation, or intention of display, but flashing out occasionally in a word or a look."

Such was the way in which the undergraduate of twenty-one judged the great painter whom he was about a year or two later to expound, to interpret, to belaud, and to immortalise in burning words to a dazzled but somewhat puzzled world.

CHAPTER IV

MODERN PAINTERS

We have now reached the opening of young Ruskin's career as an Apostle of Nature and Art, with that book which, in spite of his own disclaimers and many strong reasons to the contrary, the world has agreed to regard as his central and typical work. His mission was to preach the æsthetic study of Nature and to justify Turner as the chief interpreter of the new Nature-Worship. As soon as he returned from what seems to have been his fifth visit to the Alps, and had put on his bachelor's gown at Oxford, he settled down at home in Herne Hill to write his *Modern Painters* in the autumn and winter of 1842, he being then twenty-three. Each piece when finished was read aloud to the father and mother and cousin Mary, and would even draw tears of joy from the doting parents. It was the moment when the first portrait by George Richmond, R.A., was made—the young poet seated at a desk with pencil in hand, Mont Blanc in the background—the expression charged with pensive sensibility and inspiration. These were perhaps the critical hours of his life, undoubtedly the happiest and most unclouded.

Brimful of the Alps, of the mountains, lakes, castles, and churches of the Rhine, Switzerland, and Italy, Cumberland, and Perthshire, the personal friend of

Turner, the possessor of some of his best pieces, the pupil of Copley Fielding and Harding, the honorary class-man of Oxford and prize poet, he now fell with zeal to enlarge his *Blackwood* pleading for Turner, and his "Kata Phusin" dogmas of the following of Nature's law. But, first, the true dogmas had to be expounded and old dogmas revised. And, nothing loth or timid, the student of Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, and Aldrich proceeded to lay down principles of Art, and right expression of natural fact, in a series of trenchant propositions, regardless of venerable axioms and popular commonplace. The dominant idea of his trumpet call to painters was to fling aside the traditions of the Academies, to go humbly to Nature, rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, scorning nothing. It was quite obvious that Canaletto, Poussin, and Claude did nothing of the kind; and they were blind leaders of the blind. Our modern (English) painters—and the lad certainly knew nothing of those abroad—did look hard at the facts of Nature, and drew what they saw; such men as Prout, C. Fielding, Harding, Cox, though each in a limited way for certain classes of facts; but Turner had given all the facts—trees, rivers, sea, clouds, mountains, details, colour, and impression—but all transfigured with his own poetry of magical sight.

This doctrine—in the main a true doctrine, which in substance has prevailed and holds the field — was asserted and reasserted with a militant confidence, of which only an Oxford prizeman who has just become B.A. is the past master, and with a subtlety, imagination, and passion of which no other man then living was capable. All this was infused with reminiscences of Greek philosophy; of Aristotle's warning to be

certain only of what we know by proof; of Plato's war against the false knowledge of the sophists and their love of fine phrases instead of evidence; of Bacon's revolt against the schoolmen; and Locke's repudiation of traditional "authority";—and it was set forth with a splendour of declamation and a torrent of illustration, with word-pictures and word-scourges, such as had never yet been dreamed of in the stolid commonplaces of conventional criticism. There was something in it of Rousseau bursting in with his appeal to Nature against the *Ancient Regimen*; something of John Wesley's appeal to the Spirit of Jesus against a pluralist Church; and even more of the cry of "Sartor" in his wrath against shams and falsehoods, but with the uncouth sarcasms of the mighty Tailor replaced by gorgeous records of foreign travel, and symphonies rehearsed in most majestic descant.

The book was finished in the winter, and was published in May 1843. The intended title of it was to be "Turner and the Ancients." But, by the advice of the publishers' reader, this was changed to the title which the original volume bore—"Modern Painters: their Superiority in the Art of Landscape Painting to all the Ancient Masters proved by Examples of the True, the Beautiful, and the Intellectual, from the Works of Modern Artists, especially from those of J. M. W. Turner, Esq., R.A." Such was the eminently veracious and characteristic sub-title of the book, exactly expressing the scope of volume i.; all the dogmatism, self-confidence, fighting, and chivalrous temper of the new gospel. As it was thought, especially by the wary father, likely to be regarded as presumptuous in a young man of twenty-four, the author's name was

suppressed, and the book was signed by "A Graduate of Oxford." In spite of this economy of strict truth in literature, the young knight, with his coat-of-arms veiled in mystery, hung forth his challenge to defend his Master against all comers in the lists of Art before the judges of Beauty and Truth in the presentation of Nature.

The appearance of volume i. of *Modern Painters* produced a real sensation in the artistic, and even in the literary world. The recognised organs of criticism were hostile and contemptuous. The painters whom he had criticised and praised were not all satisfied with qualified eulogium; and Turner was rather overwhelmed by the zeal of his young friend. There was much in the outspoken heresy of the youthful reformer to scandalise the connoisseur, the veteran artist, the hack writer, and the Bible literalist. But men of insight saw in it a new idea. The poet Rogers, to whom John Ruskin had been presented as a boy, and who asked him to his famous breakfast parties, allowed the book to lie on his table. Tennyson, who saw Nature so often in kindred ways, begged for the book. Sydney Smith, as we have seen, recognised its power. Sir Henry Taylor thought it more deeply founded than any other that he knew. Poets were the first to call into their company the prose poet of Nature who had placed the lasting crown on the head of the colour-poet of Nature.

The world of culture, as its way is, soon caught hold of a new man; and the Oxford graduate was received in society and met at dinner tables. The delighted father had no scruple now in divulging the author's name. He bought for his son Turner's "Slave Ship,"

a picture of tremendous power and almost ghastly realism, which long hung on the dining-room wall. The family had now left the Herne Hill house for a more spacious abode at Denmark Hill. The present writer remembers it as an ample country house of good proportions standing in its own grounds of some seven acres, with carriage drive, gardens, shrubbery, paddock, and small farm, an airy and charming site, the walls of the rooms covered with choice specimens of Turner's drawings. The family lived there until the death of old Mrs. Ruskin in 1871, and often dispensed a hearty hospitality, ever rejoiced to show the treasures of the place—no less than thirty Turners, half-a-dozen Hunts, a Tintoretto, the collection of minerals; apples, peaches —"pigs especially, highly educated, who spoke excellent Irish."

The father, now wholly converted to Turner, and become one of his regular purchasers, was eager to have *Modern Painters* continued. It was to enlarge on the principle of Truth and to give ample illustrations of mountains, foliage, and clouds. And so, after the father's birthday in May 1844, the whole family started for Switzerland for the sixth time. There John studied Mont Blanc, its glaciers and aiguilles, under the care of Couttet, the famous guide; drew the forms of both with marvellous precision and force—uniting for once the geologist, the mountaineer, and the artist—for he understood the anatomy of rocks better than any painter, and could draw as no geologist or mountaineer could do. "Many and many an hour of precious time and perfect sight was spent during these years in thus watching skies . . . much was learned, which is of no use now to anybody; for to me it is only a sorrowful

memory, and to others an old man's fantasy" (*Præterita*, ii. 94, 1886).

There he met Professor Forbes, studied glacier forms with him, and became an ardent supporter of the "viscous" theory. Thence on to the Italian lakes and the Simplon Pass, where he made drawings and still more delicious diaries of natural forms and landscapes. He visited the Bel Alp and Zermatt, and wondered at the Matterhorn and the Weisshorn, which seemed to him inferior to Mont Blanc. And so home by Paris, which he was now sufficiently cured "to bear the sight of again," and visited the Louvre. And here he found a great change come over the spirit of his art dream. He saw much in ancient Italian art to which he had hitherto been indifferent. He wonders, and we may wonder, how such a man could be, at twenty-five, so ignorant of early Italian painting; indeed, so callous, for at the age of twenty-two he had seen Milan, Pisa, Florence, Venice, and Rome. But in the summer of 1844, all at once, he tells us, he saw all the greatness of Titian, of Veronese, Bellini, and Perugino. He found, in fact, that what the graduate of Oxford had pored over so intently for ten years was but a single corner of the world of art; that very great men had lived long before Turner, and had other ideals besides those of Turner; nay, that the author of a new Gospel of art should know something of the history of art—and even the history of man—wherein our graduate was still but a tiro. In short, the defence of Turner and the Moderns must be enlarged, and the Ancients must be studied anew.

The autumn and winter of 1844 was given to study, mainly of mediæval history and art, to Rio and Lord

Lindsay; and it seemed essential before continuing *Modern Painters* to work at Pisa and Florence. Accordingly, in April 1845, he started abroad, for the first time without his parents, but with George, his valet, and Couttet, his Chamouni guide. Some lines written at Geneva on Mont Blanc in a deeply religious strain convinced him that he could say nothing rightly in verse, and (no doubt wisely) he renounced poetry for ever. Lucca seems first to have opened his eyes to the power of building, and the tomb of Ilaria di Caretto became "a supreme guide to him ever after." He now had books, and pored over Dante, in Cary's translation, Sismondi's *Italian Republics*, and Lord Lindsay's *Christian Art*. Pisa and the Campo Santo—where he saw "the entire doctrine of Christianity painted so that a child could understand it"—deepened his enthusiasm for mediæval art. He drank in the whole Gospel in these frescoes, "straight to its purpose, in the clearest and most eager way." Here at Pisa, with the Spina Chapel, he saw the school of his Italian studies fixed for many years, as he sat drawing with intense zeal from six in the morning till four in the afternoon.

From Pisa to Florence, where he flung himself into monasteries and chapels, at Santa Maria Novella, Santa Croce, and San Marco, absorbed in Angelico and Ghirlandajo—"Lippi and Botticelli were still far beyond him"—or strolling up after dinner to Fésole or San Miniato. At Florence his work was "thinking and writing." Thence he went north to Macugnaga under Monte Rosa—where, oddly enough, he found little to interest him, except in reading, for the first time seriously, Shakespeare's Roman plays; and as to

Val Anzasca, it had no interesting features! Such was his "desultory, but careful, reading, which began in his mossy cell at Macugnaga." Thence he took the St. Gothard route to Faïdo and Dazio Grande, and did the work which is one of the gems of *Modern Painters*, vol. iii. At Baveno he was joined by Harding, and they toured about the lakes and to Verona—"no happier epoch than it was to both." We are told that "though Rouen, Geneva, and Pisa have been the centres of thought and teaching to me, Verona has given the colouring to all they taught." He went on to Venice for Harding's sake, where for a week they lounged about the markets and the boats, looking for effects of light on city and on sea. But in a spare hour they dropped into the Scuola di San Rocco. There, of a sudden, Tintoretto revealed himself, and largely determined the current of Ruskin's future life.

There have been recorded (mainly by himself) a good many casual incidents which determined the bent of his life—the gift of Rogers's *Italy*, the first sight of the Alps, a bit of ivy round a thorn, the tomb of Ilaria, the Campo Santo, Mont Blanc, a Veronese in the Louvre—but this first vision of the Tintorettos of St. Roch seems to have been the most real and most important of all these æsthetic conversions. But for that "sunny, but luckless, day," when the porter opened the door of the then neglected hall as if they were the gates of Paradise, Ruskin thinks he should have written the Stones of Chamouni instead of the Stones of Venice. But Tintoretto swept him away into the schools of Venice, forcing him to the study of the history of Venice itself. This was the new heaven of invention into which he was suddenly summoned.

And at the same time came on him—and on the world —"a new fatality," the consequences of which he little saw at the moment—the discovery of photography.

At Venice with Harding, studying pictures and sunsets, they were joined by Boxall, R.A., some time keeper of the National Gallery; and they saw much of Mrs. Jameson—who was "absolutely without knowledge or instinct of painting"—but candid, industrious, and pleasant. A fever drove him away—evidently malarious, though he will not admit it—nobody goes studying in Venice without catching malaria; and he dragged himself home in deep depression, and with a vision of death before him. He now, he tells us, almost for the first time, prayed to God with fervent belief and deep humility. And there he had the consciousness of his prayer being answered. The experience did not last. Little by little the sense of direct relation with Heaven passed away from him. He had scarcely reached home in safety before he had "sunk back into the faintness and darkness of the Under-World."

In *Præterita* (ii. 159), Ruskin has attempted to describe his religious attitude whilst writing volume ii. of *Modern Painters*; but we must not forget that this was looking backward forty years, and the whole of these Confessions are coloured by a half-ironical humbleness of temper very hard to measure.

"It is extremely difficult to define," he says, "much more to explain, the religious temper in which I designed that second volume. Whatever I know or feel now of the justice of God, the nobleness of man, and the beauty of nature, I knew and felt then, nor less strongly: but these firm faiths were confused by the continual discovery, day by day, of error or limitation in the doctrines I had been taught, and follies or inconsistencies

in their teachers; while for myself, it seemed to me quite sure, since my downfall of heart on last leaving France, that I had no part nor lot in the privileges of the saints; but, on the contrary, had such share only in the things of God, as well-conducted beasts and serenely-minded birds had," etc., etc., etc.

Ruskin never would see, as so many persons refuse to see, how largely states of temperament, of health, and of grief, hope, and despair, react on spiritual impressions and religious elation. "Experiences," like ghosts, are too often problems for the physician. Ruskin's attitude as to religion, whilst he never became a sceptic or an atheist, continually shifted, and was in curiously close relation to his moral, mental, and physical equilibrium at the time.

The very sentence just cited ends in some delicious raillery about the coat of arms which the prosperous wine merchant now chose to place upon the carriage he set up at this time. It was varied from the family coat of Ruskin: *sable*, a *chevron* between six lance-heads, *argent*, by an addition on the chevron of three cross-crosslets *gules* ("in case of my still becoming a clergyman!"); and for crest, after much poring over heraldic books, a boar's head was chosen, and the motto "age, quod agis"—a crest which John would perversely call a pig, and himself as "Little Pig"; and the motto was exchanged into "To-day." It was this crest of the Boar's head which occasioned the famous rhyme in *Punch* (? by Tom Taylor)—

"I paints and paints,
Hears no complaints,
And sells before I'm dry,
Till savage Ruskin
Sticks his tusk in,
And nobody will buy."

And in further allusion to the Boar, he took as his patron saint Saint Anthony of Padua, who is represented in solitude amongst the swine.

All the winter of 1845-46, Ruskin was at work on his second volume, which appeared early in the summer of 1846. He had two distinct instincts to satisfy in it, he writes: the first, to explain the quality of the beauty in all happy conditions of living organism; the second, to illustrate two schools then unknown to the British public—that of Angelico in Florence, and Tintoretto in Venice. The style of the book was modelled on Hooker, which was a pity. And, not unnaturally, when it was ended, he felt tired. "It is usually read only for its pretty passages," he thinks; "its theory of beauty is scarcely ever noticed"; and its praise of Tintoretto did not induce the nation to buy any good example of him. But it led, he feels sure, to a truer estimate of early religious art, and to a deeper interest in the painters he had glorified. Yes! it did this—and it did much more. His personal and literary influence turned the taste of the age towards what the French call the "Primitives," and secured for them an adequate place in our National Gallery and public and private collections.

CHAPTER V

THE SEVEN LAMPS OF ARCHITECTURE

HARDLY were the last pages of *Modern Painters*, vol. ii., returned "for Press," when the tired writer and his family set off again for the Alps. That unfailing remedy for all ills was not tried in vain—"the power of mountains in solemnising the thoughts and purifying the heart." He records the "immeasurable delight" of watching the ship plunging through the waves towards Calais pier, and the prospect "of the horses' heads set straight for Mont Blanc to-morrow." They crossed the Mont Cenis to Turin, Verona, and Venice; and John tried, with scanty success, to convert his father from Modern Painters to Venetian architecture. The son was impetuous; but the father was obstinate. John says that he too was "viciously stubborn" as well as impetuous; and "more and more persuaded every day that everybody was always wrong." But he insists that his arrogance was founded not on vanity, but in sorrow. "Accuse me not of arrogance," he says, "if, having walked with nature," his one thought was to learn, to teach truth, not to win fame. And this is absolutely true.

They all returned to Chamouni, where more studies of rocks and glaciers were made with intense rapture. The martinets who used to sneer at the sonorous

sentences of these art books as if it were clap-trap word-painting, coloured to catch the groundlings, might be surprised to see in the private diaries of this time the same realist painting, the same overflowing language. These were mere notes, jotted down at night, intended for no eye but his own, to record impressions; and yet they have the precision, the glow, and even the music of his finished books. Ruskin, like Stephen Phillips's "Herod," "thought in gold and dreamed in silver" words, even in his inmost meditations. The jottings of his private day-book fell spontaneously into magnificent imagery and glowing pictures—

"*August* 23 (1840).—Rained all day—note the intense scarletty purple of the shattered larch stems, wet, opposed with yellow from decomposing turpentine; the alder stems looking much like birch, covered with the white branchy moss that looks like coral."

This bit—much the same in words as one of Turner's note-sketches—was not printed for nearly fifty years after it was written down. And here is another bit from the diary (26th July 1854)—

"I was up by the mill-stream this evening, and climbed to the right of it, up among the sloping waves of grass. I never was so struck by their intense beauty—the masses of walnut shading them with their broad, cool, clearly-formed leafage; the grey glossy stems of the cherry trees, as if bound round tight with satin, twining and writhing against the shadows; the tall pollards of oak set here and there in the soft banks, as if to show their smoothness by contrast, yet themselves beautiful, rugged, and covered with deep brown and bright silver moss. Here and there a chestnut—sharp, and soft, and starry; and always the steep banks, one above another, melting into terraces of pure velvet, gilded with corn; here

and there a black—jet-black—crag of slate breaking into a frown above them, and mouldering away down into the gloomy torrent bed, fringed on its opposite edge, a grisly cliff, with delicate birch and pine, rising against the snow light of Mont Blanc. And opposite always the mighty Varens lost in the cloud its ineffable walls of crag."

Your Alpine tourist does not look in this way, does not see in this way, and his diary at night is not so kept. But Ruskin felt like this and wrote like this—he could not help it—even to remind himself in private of the vision in which he had taken such joy.

Returning home, the young author found himself already famous and welcomed in the world of letters. Miss Mitford found him "the most charming person that I have ever known." John Murray sought to enlist him for Albemarle Street, and Lockhart enrolled him in the *Quarterly Review*. He was induced to write a review of Lord Lindsay's *Christian Art*. He says he knew that Lord Lindsay knew more about Italian painting than he did himself, but there was another motive—"one of an irresistible nature." Charlotte, Lockhart's daughter, "a Scottish fairy, White Lady, and witch of the fatallest sort, looking as if she had just risen out of the stream in Rhymer's Glen, and could only be seen by favouring glance of moonlight over the Eildons," was met at the house of Sir Humphry Davy's widow. John naturally fell in love with Sir Walter Scott's fairy grand-daughter, sighed in silence, could never come to any serious speech with her, "she didn't care for a word I said"; and so at the dinner-table quarrelled with Mr. Gladstone about Neapolitan prisons across her, as usual did his wooing by the pen, wrote on *Christian Art* in order

to charm her, found it hopeless, went away in despair, again fell into despondency and sickness; and Charlotte Lockhart, as we know, married Hope Scott.

Reduced again to a heap of white ashes in the spring of 1847, he retired to Ambleside and fell into a state of despondency such as he did not know again till 1861; and what with disappointment, dyspepsia, and the tedium of his *Quarterly* article, he came home in such a state of ill-health that his parents sent him off again to be treated by Dr. Jephson at Leamington. And now, failing in love, he surrendered himself to friendship. He says, "I get distinctively attached to places, to pictures, to dogs, cats, and girls"—but to a soul-kinship with men he was not at all disposed. Let no one suppose that John Ruskin was a man without friends, and did not cherish many life-long friendships. He was one of the most lovable and loving of men, full of sympathy and open heart. But his friendships with men were not that consuming passion as was his love of mountains, seas, pets, and paintings So off he went to visit Macdonald Macdonald at Crossmount beneath Schehallien in the Highlands. Disgusted with "sport," in melancholy mood, he dug up thistles on the moor, lay awake listening to the hooting of the owls, and sadly pondered upon this life—on Calvinist religion—and the life to come.

Now here occurs a big gap of two years in the author's autobiography; and it must remain a gap in our story. The tenth chapter of *Præterita* ends with the autumn of 1847; and the eleventh chapter opens in July 1849. During the two years there took place his marriage, the bridegroom's dangerous illness, his settling in Park Street, London, and his writing the

Seven Lamps of Architecture. Of all this he has told us nothing, and what concerns the public can be told in a few words. The parents came to the conclusion that John's health and spirits were only to be cured by matrimony; and they pressed him to marry the daughter of their old Perthshire friends, the Grays. Seven years before this they had been visitors at Herne Hill; and the girl had challenged John to write her a fairy-story, which he cheerfully undertook. It was the *King of the Golden River*—a medley of Grimm, Dickens, and the Alps. Accordingly, somewhat suddenly and perhaps unthinkingly, John Ruskin was married at Perth to Euphemia Chalmers Gray on 10th April 1848—a day famous in the annals of London Chartism. She was a grand beauty, of high spirit, whom all the world knows as the triumphant wife in the famous picture, "The Order for Release," in the Tate Gallery. On their way south, Ruskin caught a sharp attack in the lungs whilst sketching in Salisbury Cathedral, and his life was in great danger. Foreign travel, the invariable panacea, and in company with the whole family, was tried again; but a fresh attack in Normandy forced them back. At last they set off, stopping at cathedral cities, John absorbed in architecture. In October the pair set up house in Park Street, and Ruskin fell with fury on the compiling his *Seven Lamps*, which occupied him the winter of 1848-49. It was published in the spring of 1849; but in the meantime the whole Ruskin family were off again to the Alps—John with Couttet the guide and George the valet, but apparently without his wife.

At any rate, her name is never mentioned in the diaries of travel in the Alps, in *Præterita* or *Fors*, nor

in the Memoirs sanctioned by the family and their friends. Nor does it concern the public to tear down the veil they have chosen to draw round the married life of John Ruskin. It is evident that it brought no happiness to either, and was but marriage in name, though no suggestion of rupture or dispute has ever been made known. During the whole time Ruskin pursued his architectural studies with eagerness, wrote, travelled, and collected materials. London and Society bored him and irritated him, whilst they absorbed the wife. He once took her to a ball at Venice, and to Court at Buckingham Palace. In the summer of 1853 J. Everett Millais, afterwards President of the Royal Academy, stayed with the Ruskins at Glenfinlas, where he painted both. One day the wife left her husband and returned to her parents. A suit in the Scotch court for nullity of marriage was brought by the wife, and was not defended by the husband. Euphemia Gray then married the brilliant painter, and was well known as Lady Millais in the world of London and of Perthshire. John returned to his parents at Denmark Hill, and remained with them there till their deaths. Neither the marriage, nor the nullification of it, seriously affected his habits or his books. It is not the duty of a biographer to pass judgment on this miserable episode in a chequered life.

The *Seven Lamps of Architecture* had been looked for with lively expectancy by the world of culture, and it did not disappoint their hopes. The book did for the art of building what *Modern Painters* had done for the art of painting: it shook conventional ideas to the root, and flung forth a body of new and pregnant ideas. It was marked by the same fearlessness, a dogmatism as great,

and an even more stirring eloquence. It was the first of these works to appear with illustrations; and it opened a brilliant series of writings, in which the critic combined an irresistible gift of language with an exquisite mastery of the pencil. It addressed also a much larger world than *Modern Painters* could do. The lovers of Turner, Hunt, Angelico, and Tintoretto were at that date few. But all men could see or take interest in public buildings; and the young reformer boldly laid down laws for ordinary homes and even house decoration. The *Lamps* accordingly lighted up a new region and shone across a far wider circle of readers.

The *Seven Lamps* (and he tells us the difficulty he had to prevent their becoming eight or even nine) were Truth, Beauty, Power, Sacrifice, Obedience, Labour, Memory; and to each of these moral, intellectual, and spiritual ideas to be represented in stone, he devoted a chapter of marvellous ingenuity, enthusiasm, and eloquence. Needless to add that they bristled with paradoxes, contradictions, sophisms, and wild hypotheses. It would require an entire volume to state them all, and three more volumes to analyse and disentangle them from the truths to which they clung like the ivy and mosses on a tower of limestone The truths were cemented into the foundations, and have stood solid and unshaken for two generations. The law of Truth in Art stands beside Carlyle's protest against "Shams!" That a building should look what it is, and be what it is built to serve—no one now dares dispute. That beauty itself comes second to truth, and must be sought in the architecture of Nature herself; that the art of building reflects the life and

manners, the passions and religion, of those who build; that in building we have to consider the hands by which it is wrought; that art is not an end in itself, but the instrument wherein moral, intellectual, national, and social ideals are expressed;—all this is now the alphabet of sound art.

The *Seven Lamps* is the work which the author himself has most vehemently criticised, and in which he seems to take the least interest. It is hardly referred to in *Præterita*, or in *Fors*, except by way of disparagement. Not, perhaps, that he specially rejects the opinions there expressed, except his early Puritanism, but he condemns it for the *purpurei panni* of the book, its rhetoric, and display of word-painting. It must be confessed that there is in it more conscious literary gesticulation than in any other of his works, and its whole style is in contrast with the simplicity and ease of his social writings. But it is the eloquence of passion, not of display; and if it be too often splendid declamation, the grandeur of the language is in harmony with the elevation of the thought. One does not condemn the *Sermons* of Bossuet, or the diatribes of Milton, because they may be accused of "eloquence." I am disposed to hold that English prose has no more impressive passage than the famous peroration to the "Lamp of Sacrifice." It is oddly enough about "Luxuriance of Ornament"—

> "Ornament cannot be overcharged if it be good, and is always overcharged when it is bad. . . . Those very styles of haughty simplicity owe part of their pleasantness to contrast, and would be wearisome if universal. They are but the rests and monotones of the art; it is to far happier, far higher, exaltation that we owe those fair fronts of variegated mosaic,

charged with wild fancies and dark hosts of imagery, thicker and quainter than ever filled the depth of midsummer dream; those vaulted gates, trellised with close leaves; those window labyrinths of twisted tracery and starry light; those misty masses of multitudinous pinnacle and diademed tower; the only witnesses, perhaps, that remain to us of the faith and fear of nations. All else for which the builders sacrificed has passed away—all their living interests, and aims, and achievements. We know not for what they laboured, and we see no evidence of their reward. Victory, wealth, authority, happiness—all have departed, though bought by many a bitter sacrifice. But of them and their life and their toil upon the earth, one reward, one evidence, is left to us in those grey heaps of deep-wrought stone. They have taken with them to the grave their powers, their honours, and their errors; but they have left us their adoration."

No man of feeling who has in him the echoes of this funeral sermon can stand before a great mediæval cathedral without being conscious that it has gained for him a new meaning, a sublimer pathos.

And what teaching there is in the famous lesson as to "Chiaroscuro in Architecture"!

"I do not believe that any building was ever truly great, unless it had mighty masses, vigorous and deep, of shadow mingled with its surface. And among the first habits that a young architect should learn, is that of thinking in shadow, not looking at a design in its miserable, liny skeleton; but conceiving it as it will be when the dawn lights it and the dusk leaves it; when its stones will be hot and its crannies cool; when the lizards will bask on the one and the birds build in the other. Let him design with the sense of cold and heat upon him; let him cut out the shadows, as men dig wells in unwatered plains, and lead along the lights, as a founder does his hot metal; let him keep the full command of both, and see that he knows how they fall, and where they fade. His paper lines and proportions are of no value; all

that he has to do must be done by spaces of light and darkness; and his business is to see that the one is broad and bold enough not to be swallowed up by twilight, and the other deep enough not to be dried like a shallow pool by a noonday sun."

Who can forget the hymn to Giotto's Campanile, or to the porticoes of Rouen and Lucca, and the mosaics of St. Mark, or the noble protest against "Restoration," and that counsel of perfection to raise permanent homes for ourselves, and to respect that "sanctity in a good man's house that cannot be renewed"?

M. Jacques Bardoux of Paris, in his excellent book *John Ruskin*, insists that his principal art works are those on architecture, and that the *Seven Lamps* and the *Stones of Venice* are the two of most importance. So far as relates to his æsthetic teaching this is true. It seems that the *Seven Lamps* has had more visible and practical effect on our modern life than any other of his books, in spite of all its heresies and impracticabilities. And it must not be forgotten how saturated it is with moral and social fervour, how inexorably it forces art to find its right to exist in the moral law, and how deeply it inspires in the artist the regard for humanity and for duty. The gospel of the *Seven Lamps*, after all, is not preached to inculcate the virtue of Gothic traceries or Venetian arcades, but the moralisation and the socialisation of all art—and especially of the arts of building: which, in truth, affect human life, domestic, social, political, and religious, far more constantly and more deeply than any other art can do.

It was the studies and the meditation which are embodied in the *Seven Lamps* that first turned John

Ruskin from drawings to man, from wall pictures to history and to social institutions—which converted him at last from an æsthetic connoisseur into a moralist who went forth into a scornful world to teach a new Gospel of Work and a regeneration of the Social Organism.

CHAPTER VI

THE STONES OF VENICE

RUSKIN'S first sight of Venice was in 1835, at the age of sixteen, when he was taken away from school after the attack of pleurisy. In May 1841, when he was twenty-two, during his Oxford career, he again spent ten days in Venice. He recovered heart, he says, after that melancholy winter in Rome, as the enchanted world of Venice opened in front of him. He has told us of his joys in those early days of the sea-city before the railway was begun, "when everything, muddy Brenta, vulgar villa, dusty causeway, sandy beach, was equally rich in rapture, on the morning that brought us in sight of Venice; and the black knot of gondolas in the canal of Mestre were more beautiful to me than a sunrise full of clouds all scarlet and gold." How to tell, how to explain this rapture, he knows not. His Venice, he says, like Turner's, had been chiefly created for him by Byron; but besides there was for Ruskin "the childish passion of pleasure" in watching the boats and the gondolas and marble walls rising out of the salt sea, with hosts of little brown crabs on them, and Titians inside. In his diary for 6th May 1841, he finds written:—"Thank God, I am here; it is the Paradise of cities. . . . This and Chamouni are my two bournes of earth."

It was in 1845, when he was twenty-six, that he first rose to the full height of understanding Venetian Art, with Harding the painter as his companion. It was in his memorable visit to the School of St. Roch that the power of Tintoretto's imagination first impressed him, and "forced him into the study of the history of Venice herself." He had made careful sketches there both in 1841 and 1845; and on the publication of the *Seven Lamps*, he resolved to write the *Stones of Venice*, even before *Modern Painters* was completed. The new work was to be no book on Architecture, any more than *Modern Painters* was a book on Painting. It was to be a concrete expansion of the *Lamps*—the intimate action and reaction of beliefs, ideals, and habits upon the external aspect of nations, their art, their homes, and their public and private buildings. It was to be a "sermon in stones," addressed to the English nation, which had so many historic analogies with the Venetian oligarchy—which a similar career of pride, luxury, and infidelity would eventually lead to the same decay.

In his second lecture in the *Crown of Wild Olive* he thus explains the purpose of his two main works on Architecture:—

"The book I called the *Seven Lamps* was to show that certain right states of temper and moral feeling were the magic powers by which all good architecture without exception had been produced. The *Stones of Venice* had, from beginning to end, no other aim than to show that the Gothic architecture of Venice had arisen out of, and indicated in all its features, a state of pure national faith and of domestic virtue; and that its Renaissance architecture had arisen out of, and in all its features indicated, a state of concealed national infidelity and of domestic corruption. . . . In all my past work, my

endeavour has been to show that good architecture is essentially religious—the production of a faithful and virtuous, not of an infidel and corrupted people. But I have had also to show that good architecture is not *ecclesiastical*. . . . Good architecture has always been the work of the commonalty, *not* of the clergy. . . . It is the manly language of a people inspired by resolute and common purpose, and rendering resolute and common fidelity to the legible laws of an undoubted God."

"The *Stones of Venice*," he wrote in the last volume of *Fors* (1877), "taught the laws of constructive art, and the dependence of all human work or edifice for its beauty on the happy life of the workman." This is, in truth, the keynote of Ruskin's philosophy of art, and the link that binds his philosophy of art to his ultimate social gospel. It embodies in essence a great and most potent truth, if by "religion" we mean an active reverence for a dominant moral ideal. The idea is not new. For as I reminded Ruskin in 1876, Auguste Comte had long before spoken of mediæval cathedrals as the most perfect expression of the ideas and feelings of man's moral nature. To extend this law to all forms of art, and to give it the absolute character that Ruskin attempted, involves us in hopeless paradox and mischievous absurdities. As I pointed out to *Fors Clavigera*, the very pictures of Perugino, Titian, and Tintoretto were painted in societies corrupt and sensual to the core; one side of Greek sculpture was actually inspired by a detestable type of vice; and the triumphs of music date from times of curious affectation and rottenness. It never seems to have occurred to Ruskin that the very works of imagination which he adores as almost divine were exactly contemporary with others that he treats as emanation

from hell; that many of the purest works of art were produced in times of foul crime; that some of the most devout and moral of nations have expressed their artistic longings in terms of vulgar commonplace.

Architecture is far the most social and national of all the arts; and, more than any other art, is affected by the moral tone dominant in the society that employs it and by the national ideals in vogue; and that for the simple reason that all great buildings are raised by the public for the use of the public, and not by individual artists for the enjoyment of a single owner. But, even in architecture, these sweeping generalisations are wont to burst like bubbles. Among the noblest buildings ever raised by man, and those which have exerted the most potent influence on after ages, we must count the Parthenon, the Pantheon at Rome, the Church of S. Sophia at Constantinople, and St. Paul's in London. The Parthenon was nearly contemporary with the comedies of Aristophanes and the Sophists of Athens —not with Marathon and Æschylus. The Pantheon, now known to be of the age of Hadrian, was nearly contemporary with the satires of Juvenal and the epigrams of Martial. S. Sophia was built by the husband of the Empress Theodora; and St. Paul's was building in the era of Charles II. and James II. Were all these sublime masterpieces of the building art— Parthenon, Pantheon, S. Sophia, and St. Paul's—"the production of a faithful and virtuous people"? It is curious that they synchronise with some of the most scathing satires upon personal and social corruption that survive in Greek, Latin, Byzantine, and English literature.

The author tells us of "the steady course of historical

reading by which he prepared himself to write the *Stones of Venice*"; how his study of history prevented him from accepting Catholic teaching, for all his reverence for the Catholic art of the great ages; how about this time he made the inevitable discovery of the falseness of the religious doctrines in which he had been educated—what he calls "the breaking down of his Puritan faith." In *Præterita* he tells us the ten years 1850-1860 were "for the most part wasted in useless work," and he thus records the time in diary fashion:—

"1851. Turner dies, while I am at first main work in Venice for the *Stones of Venice*.

1852. Final work in Venice for *Stones of Venice*. Book finished that winter. Six hundred quarto pages of notes of it, fairly and closely written, now useless. Drawings as many—of a sort—useless too."

But in this case, as in the rest of such autobiographic notes, we must remember that it was written nearly forty years after the events; that his later years were too often a time of sadness, of self-depreciation, of recantation; and that we cannot trust his memory or take too literally what he has written of himself at any date after his long illness of 1878. The *Stones of Venice* was, in fact, one of the most rapidly executed and most complete of all his works. He went to Venice in November 1849, and settled there with his wife. He plunged into minute study of the Ducal Palace, St. Mark's, and other buildings, made exact drawings, measurements, and copious notes, and sought to make out by original research the dates, sources, and origin of each fragment—the capitals, balustrades, colonnades—literally the *stones*, not the buildings, of Venice.

He remained working in Venice the four months of winter, and returned in the spring of 1850 to write the first volume and to prepare the illustrations. For these illustrations he employed some of the most accomplished engravers of the English school before its decline into photographic reproduction. These exquisite pieces are still in great demand, and add to the bibliographic value of the first edition. Ruskin personally superintended all these engravings from his own sketches, working them up to the highest point of perfection, again and again having fresh touches and delicate shades introduced. He founded, in truth, a real school of engravers, which, in spite of its excessive refinement, will always be an honour to English art. And his own part, as author of the original designs, also as chief master of the school which reproduced them, entitles him to be considered as the real creator of these fascinating pieces in their final form of engravings.

Working mainly in London—where he now lived in Park Street, and was even to be seen in society and at court—Ruskin brought out the first volume of the *Stones of Venice* early in 1851. In spite of the indignation of architects and critics not a few, the book was received with applause, and undoubtedly raised his reputation with the world. Of course, it stirred a cloud of controversies, which fastened on the social and industrial heresies of the new prophet as well as on his artistic dogmas. It was the year of the first Great International Exhibition, when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert called the world of Art, Invention, and Labour to compare their works in the great glass house that the gardener, Sir Joseph Paxton, had raised in Hyde

Park. It was the crucial epoch when Early Victorian æstheticism first began to ask itself whether its ideals and forms were the absolute canons of taste, if the Houses of Parliament and the Royal Exchange were the last word in building, and if Maclise and Etty really held the field of painting against all rivals.

Thomas Carlyle, then a notable force in the new world that was opening, hailed the book with joy.

"A strange, unexpected, and, I believe, most true and excellent *Sermon in Stones*, as well as the best piece of schoolmastering in Architectonics, from which I hope to learn in a great many ways. The spirit and purpose of these critical studies of yours are a singular sign of the times to me, and a very gratifying one. Right good speed to you, and victorious arrival on the farther shore! It is a quite new 'Renaissance,' I believe, we are getting into just now; either towards new, *wider* manhood, high again as the eternal stars, or else into final death, and the mask of Gehenna for evermore!"

So far Sartor!—and we see that John Ruskin was not the only writer, in the middle of the last century, who used violent language and nourished big vaticinations. And Charlotte Brontë wrote: "The *Stones of Venice* seem nobly laid and chiselled. How grandly the quarry of vast marbles is disclosed! Mr. Ruskin seems to me one of the few genuine writers, as distinguished from book-makers, of this age." A just and clear-sighted thought, worthy of *Jane Eyre*, with her way of seeing through outward show to the soul within the husk.

In 1852 Ruskin made another long stay in Venice; and, as he wrote thence to the poet Rogers, the enchantment of the city began to wane for him; and he wishes that it may become at last a ruin rather than a modern Frenchified town. But he pushed on with his

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book, having left Park Street for Herne Hill; and at last, early in 1853, the *Stones of Venice* was completed, and the second and third volumes published by Smith and Elder.

The *Stones of Venice*, we have seen, was designed as a concrete expansion of the *Seven Lamps*—to give historical and material proof of the intimate reaction of a noble type of public and private life on the edifices erected by the nation it inspired. It is less fanciful than the *Seven Lamps*, less discursive, much less disfigured by rhetoric, less combative, and yet quite as resolute in purpose. The book is thus the most coherent and organic of all Ruskin's larger works, and in its main aim—to draw attention to the unique merits of Venetian buildings and to protest against the fashionable imitation of Palladian buildings—it must be pronounced to have achieved a notable success. Much of all he preached as to the slavery of the modern workman to his machines, as to the moral, social, and æsthetic evils of mechanical handiwork, as to the dreariness of the conventional imitation of woods and marbles, as to the monotony of perpendicular traceries and debased triglyphs, has been burnt into the minds of our generation.

One of the most remarkable effects of his study has been the interest he has aroused in Byzantine architecture—the real parent of Venetian—a style which our age is much more inclined to study and adapt than it is inclined to study and adapt the Venetian models proper. It is not apparent that Ruskin at all understood the real relation of the buildings and arts he found at Venice to their true sources in the Byzantine school and in Greek invention. The half century that

has passed since he wrote has thrown a flood of light upon the history of Byzantine art and its far-radiating influence on all forms of art in the West. It is a remarkable instance of Ruskin's genius that, long before the special studies in Southern Italy and the Mediterranean seaboard which have given us so much new information, he does seem to have said nothing which the later studies have disproved, if, indeed, he does not seem from time to time implicitly to have felt the truth.

The fine enthusiasm with which again and again in the *Stones of Venice* Ruskin pleads the cause of the freedom of the workman from the degrading monotony of mechanical repetition, has had indirect effects far and wide, in places which are not devoted to debate architectural styles. It is the obvious introduction to his second career of Socialist reformer, which began eight or ten years later; and it is the conclusive proof that one dominant idea inspired Ruskin's entire work —from *Modern Painters* to the last letter in *Fors*—the idea that all high art is the production of a faithful and virtuous age; that religion, justice, and good order are the roots of which the fine arts are but the flowers.

Unluckily, in the very act of proving to the world that all great art is essentially religious, John Ruskin proved to himself that the Puritan type of religion in which he had been trained, and which he fervently believed till the full age of manhood, would not stand the test; and when he began to modify and recast it, he found himself naturally in very deep waters. Writing from Venice in 1877 (*Fors*, lxxvi.), he goes so far as to say that "the religious teaching of those books,

and all the more for the sincerity of it, is misleading —sometimes even poisonous; always, in a manner, ridiculous." This, as usual, is rather too violent. It was no doubt written at a time of excitement; but it is republished in the authorised edition of 1896. It is true that in the decline of his mental stamina, Ruskin emerged from the theological darkness in which he groped through middle life into a rather vague form of orthodox belief. But it is significant that a great book, written to prove that all high art is produced only by "fidelity to the legible laws of an undoubted God," is declared by its author, at the close of his career, to be based on religious teaching which he now finds to be misleading, poisonous, and ridiculous.

This goes very deep down to the radical defects of Ruskin's entire teaching. He undertook to found a comprehensive scheme of the imaginative faculties on a creed which he had imbibed as a child and held with childlike fervour, without any solid study of its philosophy, or its history, or its social fruits. When all this was forced on him by the prophetic homilies of Thomas Carlyle, and by the facts of society and art he witnessed in Catholic countries, and which he learned about Catholic ages, his rapid imagination and his sympathetic nature took fire and tore off, as did Sartor himself, "the rags of Houndsditch," as Carlyle called the Biblical orthodoxy of his youth. As in theology, so in history; as in art, so in economics, Ruskin was perpetually constructing *à priori* out of his own head new schemes and theories, without any serious or systematic knowledge of theology or history, or economics, or even art.

But having said this, let us never forget that John

Ruskin was a man of rare genius, of what one of his French admirers has called "a palpitating imagination," and withal he was a man of delicate moral sensitiveness, of acute human sympathy and vision. He had some share of that Gift of the Ithuriel spear by which frauds are detected, which enabled men with such different spirits as Plato, St. John, and the Mystics, or Burke, or Shelley, to give us wondrous hints and guesses, beautiful consolations and hopes, even in their fancies, their paradoxes, and their illusions.

All that genius and insight could do without systematic learning or patient reasoning, that John Ruskin did. From the point of view of a scientific historian, it would need long years, not a few crowded months, to master the history of Venice, much less that of Italy, for the whole Middle Ages. A serious archæologist would spend as many years as Ruskin could give of months to unearth all the seaweed-overladen and buried antiquities of St. Mark's, and the palaces of the Grand Canal. A man who knew little of theology except the Bible and the volumes of sermons that were admitted into a strict Calvinist household, was not equipped to lecture Auguste Comte, Mill, Buckle, and Herbert Spencer about the evolution of civilisation or the history of religion. Nor was it quite decent to mock at the economists from Adam Smith to Henry Sidgwick with no more knowledge of their books than has any æsthetic curate in deacon's orders. He never could be brought to understand this. His education in a kind of Puritan nursery, and the hard shell of egoism in which his whole early life was cribbed, made this impossible. And so, John

Ruskin went forth to take up his parable against them all—artists, critics, historians, philosophers, theologians, and economists, with all the fervour and devotion of an early Christian martyr in the Roman Empire—and with the same result. He lived through a long life of contempt, and almost of persecution. But there was something in what he preached that has lived—which philosophers, theologians, and economists never could altogether supply.

Although the *Stones of Venice* is less fanciful, less discursive, less rhetorical, and less combative than *Modern Painters* or the *Seven Lamps*, this is only in a matter of degree and by comparison. There is plenty of fantasy, excursion, rhetoric, and combat in the book. But it may be called the most organic and coherent work of a man who openly scoffed at things organic and coherent. It had, of course, descriptions of scenes and places not a few—some of them as true and beautiful as anything that Ruskin ever wrote. No man can forget that exordium in the first chapter of the second volume of the *Stones* on the first approach to Venice—a piece overcharged indeed with colour and overcrowded with words—but how true, how impressive! The salt-breeze of the open lagoon; the white moaning sea-birds; the masses of black weed; the sun declining behind the belfry tower of the lonely island church, "St. George of the Seaweed"; the hills of Arqua in a dark cluster of purple pyramids; the chain of the Alps girding the northern horizon; a wall of jagged blue, with here and there a wilderness of misty precipices seen through its clefts; then the shadowy Rialto as it throws its colossal curve slowly forth from behind the palace of the Camerlenghi, so delicate, so adaman-

tine, strong as a mountain cavern, graceful as a bow just bent; and then the boat darts forth upon the breadth of silver sea—the Ducal Palace, flushed with its sanguine veins, looking to the snowy palace of Our Lady of Salvation. Yes! we know it well. All this is a "purple patch" of redundant rhetoric. True! but he who wrote it out felt Venice to move him so. We, too, feel it move us. And we cannot forget it.

I am wont to recall that comparison between St. Mark's and a quiet English cathedral in the fourth chapter of the second volume as one of the most subtly felt and mellow landscapes in words in all our literature. How exquisitely touched in are "the small formalisms mixed with its serene sublimity" in the Cathedral Close—its secluded, continuous, drowsy felicities, and the influence of those dark towers on all who have passed through the lonely square for centuries, and on all who have seen them rising far away over the wooded plain. And, then, we pass on to the crowded and resonant alleys round St. Mark's, with all their colour, lamps, virgins, and confusion of balconies, pergolas, and awnings, till the vision of St. Mark's opens on us—a multitude of pillars and white domes; a treasure-heap, partly of gold, and partly of opal and mother-of-pearl; and five great vaulted porches, ceiled with fair mosaic, and beset with sculpture of alabaster, clear as amber and delicate as ivory. True! it is all overcharged like a banquet scene by Rubens! But how vividly is it seen; how deeply is it felt!

And then the tomb of Doge Andrea Dandolo in the Baptistery of St. Mark's (vol. ii.) and the tomb of Can Grande at Verona (vol. iii.)! Has any solemn monument ever been presented to our memories with pathos

so true and painting so real? Tens of thousands go yearly to look on them from what Ruskin tells them, who would have passed otherwise with an incurious glance and a sentence from the guide-book. And, of course, though he intends to stick close to his subject —the *Stones of Venice*—there is a great deal about painting, Fra Angelico the Florentine, Rubens the Fleming, who are exalted to the skies, and about Murillo the Spaniard, and Salvator Rosa, the South Italian, who are denounced as men who sought pleasure in what is horrible and disgusting. And all this to explain the *Stones* of Venice. But such is our author's way; and for all its circumvolutions, it is a very fascinating way, and deeply suggestive even in its eccentricities and its illusions.

There is much fine moral and social edification in the book too! All that he tells us how the life and work of the actual worker is after all the essence of Art; the scorn that he pours on the pitiful tricks of imitating the grain of fine wood and marble on plaster and deal boards; the meaning of *education* as distinct from the cramming in of information; the teaching as to true and false ornament, as to variety in ornament, as to the dignity of pure colour—this and a thousand other suggestions make it, as Carlyle truly said, *a sermon in stones.*

In the sixth chapter of the second volume is a passage about the mental slavery of modern workmen which may be said to be the creed, if it be not the origin, of a new industrial school of thought. It is as powerful in expression as it is elevated in conception.

"Men may be beaten, chained, tormented, yoked like cattle, slaughtered like summer flies, and yet remain in one

sense, and the best sense, free. But to smother their souls within them, to blight and hew into rotting pollards the suckling branches of their human intelligence, to make the flesh and skin, which, after the worm's work on it, is to see God, into leathern thongs to yoke machinery with,—this is to be slave-masters indeed; and there might be more freedom in England, though her feudal lord's lightest words were worth men's lives, and though the blood of the vexed husbandman dropped in the furrows of her fields, than there is while the animation of her multitudes is sent like fuel to feed the factory smoke, and the strength of them is given daily to be wasted into the fineness of a web, or racked into the exactness of a line."

This is to wander far from the Palaces of Venice. But it is to come very close to the Social Democracy of to-day.

CHAPTER VII

SOCIETY—CRITICISM—LECTURING

THE period of Ruskin's life between the completion of the first volume of the *Stones of Venice* and the articles entitled *Unto this Last* (1851-1860) was a time of varied activity and of many publications and incidents in his career. His father collected his *Poems*, a work now in greater esteem at book sales than with the higher criticism, as we have already noted. And in 1851 he also suffered to be published *The King of the Golden River*, which ten years before he had written to amuse Euphemia Gray in her childhood. It was illustrated by Doyle, and had a great success. He now lived in London, and went not a little into society —visiting Samuel Rogers, Lord and Lady Mount Temple, Lord Houghton, Thomas Carlyle, Frederick D. Maurice, the Marshalls of Leeds, Lady Davy, and Dr. Whewell, the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. He was no doubt never at home in London society, but he met from time to time those who became his friends through life. Mr. Collingwood has printed a private and humorous letter to his mother, which is worthy of Dickens :—

"MY DEAREST MOTHER,—Horrible party last night—stiff —large — dull — fidgety — strange — run-against-everybody — know-nobody sort of party. Naval people. Young lady

claims acquaintance with me—I know as much of her as of Queen Pomare—Talk: get away as soon as I can—ask who she is—Lady ——; as wise as I was before. Introduced to a black man with chin in collar. Black man condescending—I abuse different things to black man: chiefly the House of Lords. Black man says he lives in it—asks where I live—don't want to tell him—obliged—go away and ask who he is —(——); as wise as I was before. Introduced to a young lady—young lady asks if I like drawing—go away and ask who she is—Lady (——). Keep away with back to wall and look at watch. Get away at last. Very sulky this morning —hope my father better—dearest love to you both."

And the letter to his father about a drawing-room presentation at Buckingham Palace (May 1850) is almost as lively:—

"The most awkward crush I ever saw in my life—the pit at the Surrey may perhaps show the like—nothing else. The floor was covered with the ruins of ladies' dresses, torn lace, and fallen flowers. . . . The Queen gave her hand very graciously, but looked bored. Poor thing! well she might be, with about a quarter of a mile square of people to bow to."

He now broke out in a new place, with a pamphlet on Church organisation. *Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds* was not a practical manual of husbandry, as some Northern farmers took it to be, and complained that they had been trapped into buying it by the title. It was a religious appeal to High Anglicans and strict Presbyterians to find a *modus vivendi* in a new *Eirenikon* —"one fold and one Shepherd"—the Anglican to abate his sacerdotal pretensions, and the Presbyterian no longer to stickle about the title of the Christian Overseer. The pamphlet, for all its kindly advice, did not accomplish the re-union of Protestant persuasions; and the benevolent herald of peace was astonished to

find how much deeper theological and ecclesiastical polemics could cut into men's beliefs than ever had been dreamed of in the placid philosophy of Herne Hill. It was not many years before he greatly enlarged his own philosophy of religion, and saw that any final *Eirenikon* must be based on the Brotherhood of Man.

In 1851 Ruskin took up the defence of the new movement in painting—that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brethren—and wrote the pamphlet *Pre-Raphaelitism*. The movement originated with Holman Hunt and D. G. Rossetti, who were joined by Millais and Burne-Jones, and undoubtedly made a new departure in English painting. The pamphlet was a vehement argument that the new school had the same desire for truth in natural facts, for realism in presentation, and pure colour that were to be found in Turner, in the painters praised in *Modern Painters*, as in the Primitives of mediæval Italy. There was substantial truth in this eloquent defence. Much came of it, as soon as men of original genius shook themselves free of any formulas of art, and developed their own gifts in their own way. And the misguided sect which fancied that art could be regenerated by a decalogue of new conventions to be extracted from Ruskinian literature, conventions as unnatural and as narrowing as the current conventions of the academies, gradually sank into obscurity and public indifference.

It was a time of the losses of friends. Turner died, December 1851, and made Ruskin one of his executors, an office which he renounced. And then went William Hunt and Samuel Prout. Charles Newton would have taken Ruskin with him to Greece, where he was

making researches; but the parents would not suffer their John to venture his person on so perilous a voyage, especially as it was to be made in a new-fangled steamship. It may indeed be doubted if Athens would have pleased him as much as Venice. But great things might have followed if he had ever seen Constantinople and the mountains of the Greek continent and the Ægean Sea.

In 1853 Ruskin began that valuable series of notes for the Arundel Society, explaining the Giotto frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua. This is a delightful book (now reprinted with additions, 1890). I know nothing of Ruskin's more admirable and more valuable than this sympathetic estimate of Giotto's marvellous genius and romantic life, with these brief, vivid, and strictly historic notes on Giotto's compositions. One of the best services that Ruskin has rendered to the history of art is the full appreciation of Giotto and his profound reaction on the evolution of Florentine art. Always vehement in his praise, Ruskin has not said a word too much for Giotto. Giotto is one of the few artists towards whom, in his long career as a critic for forty years in varying opinions and moods, Ruskin never permits himself to utter a word of disparagement. He returns to him again and again. *Fors* is full of Giotto. He compares Giotto to Dante, and quite truly; for of all the painters of the world none, unless it be Leonardo and Michael Angelo, give such signs of intellectual power as Giotto. He is free from the morbid and restless spirit which places those mighty natures in a world apart. And the influence exerted by Giotto on his own and succeeding generations was both greater and more wholesome than was that of Leonardo or of

Michael Angelo. Giotto was the most profound, the most humane, the soundest and most balanced intellect in the entire history of modern art. "*Ora ha Giotto il grido*"—as he had in the ages of Dante.

This Ruskin was the first to teach us. His estimate of Giotto's compositions is based on a sympathetic but not a servile understanding of the apocryphal Gospels current in the fourteenth century, and the quaint and beautiful legends of the Virgin's life. Ruskin enters into all this in the same spirit that we can conceive Giotto to have used towards the myths: penetrated with their grace, tenderness, and spiritual beauty, fired with their power as material for painting—taking them just as they had been handed down, without doubt or criticism, but without superstition, and caring for them essentially on their human and emotional side, and not on their transcendental or dogmatic side. And Ruskin, in his notes on these compositions, touches with a sure and easy hand at once the legendary, the dramatic, and the artistic side of each fresco. Nothing can be more true and suggestive than the few strokes in which he shows us "Joachim retiring to the Sheepfold," a work of marvellous dramatic pathos, recalling in its severe dignity an Athenian tombstone from the *Cerameicos*; or again, the "Angel appearing to Anna," "The Meeting at the Golden Gate," "The Virgin returning to her House," "The Annunciation," "The Salutation," "The Entombment," and "The Resurrection." When we carefully study all that Ruskin has written about Giotto, his thought and his moods, and his power of presenting human emotions, we come to rank Giotto as one of the greatest forces in the entire history of art.

In the same year, 1853, so eventful in the public and private life of Ruskin, he commenced a new career which was to be the main occupation of his later life. The recluse of Herne Hill, the now illustrious author of three magnificent works, the critic of the journals, and the theological pamphleteer, appeared as a public lecturer on the platform, with diagrams and illustrations of his own. It was before the famous Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, which has invited so many men known in literature, science, and the public service to appear in its hall. His acceptance of the task alarmed and rather scandalised his somewhat timid, conventional, and suburban parents. His mother thought him "too young," married man of thirty-four as he was; his father thought it "degrading" to expose himself to newspaper comments and personal references. There was more in the latter remark than in the former, for the moment was ill chosen for a public appearance, whilst he was a party to a matrimonial suit; but, of course, the lectures had been arranged many months before. The lectures were a summary of his views on architecture and painting, and have been frequently reprinted with that title. They were fiercely assailed by the conventional critics; and it cannot be said that they contained anything not found in his other writings, nor have they added anything to his general reputation. They are interesting mainly as his first appearance on the lecture platform, where for thirty years he was to be heard so often and with such effect.

The following year (1854) Ruskin started abroad again with his parents, with whom he had resumed his old bachelor life in his old home. In two letters to

the *Times* he made an enthusiastic defence of Holman Hunt's "Light of the World"—a picture which touched a special chord of Christian sentiment, but is rather a mediæval *rebus* to the modern man-of-the-world. The party went to Switzerland again, John being bound to continue *Modern Painters*, and himself designing an illustrated history of Switzerland, which, like so many of his designs, ultimately found no means of publication, except in the later volumes of *Modern Painters*.

In 1854 Frederick Denison Maurice, along with Dr. Furnivall, Thomas Hughes, and Charles Kingsley, founded the Working Men's College, which still flourishes in Great Ormond Street in London. It was the pioneer of a movement which has grown largely and with such good results. The idea of the College was to offer workmen and others who could not take advantage of the higher education open to the wealthy as much of the best academic training as could be given in evening classes, but to combine this teaching with a real *esprit de corps* as developed in English schools and colleges, based on the fellowship of citizens and the union of social orders. The idea sprang from the Chartist movement of 1848 and the new school of Christian Socialists, and was the eminently British and Anglican form taken by the revolutionary and socialist stir in Europe from 1840 to 1850. Carlyle's *Sartor*, Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, Hughes's *Tom Brown*, and Maurice's Broad Church *Sermons* were the literary forms of the new idea—a cultured, orderly, respectable type of Social Democracy.

The College has thriven and grown under the successive direction of Maurice, Hughes, Sir John Lubbock, and Professor Albert Dicey: it has had amongst its

teachers, students, and friends a crowd of men known in literature, politics, and the public service. It has been the parent of a long brood of colleges and societies more or less like it in purpose,—Toynbee Halls, Women's Colleges, Passmore Edwards Halls, "University Settlements," Newton Hall, and now the University Extension movement, all of them being attempts to bring the best training of our universities and schools to those whose business and resources prevent them from entering the courses of the higher education; and withal to bring together the classes into which our modern English society is stiffly divided, in a common social life and the pursuit of culture higher than that of the current business of the day.

Into this effort, which so deeply corresponded with Ruskin's own views—one indeed which had largely sprung from his own suggestions—Ruskin threw himself with enthusiasm, giving his time, money, and advice with generous freedom. Together with Rossetti and Hunt, and eventually with Burne-Jones and W. Morris, he devoted his evenings to teach drawing, and indeed much else. He there founded a school of draughtsmen, copyists, and engravers, which has grown and carried out his methods with signal success. He made friends there such as George Allen, who became his publisher, agent, and business manager, and for four years his teaching and enthusiasm contributed largely to the success of the College. I was myself one of the lecturers there about the same time; and I had abundant reason to know the inspiring effort Ruskin gave to students and teachers alike by his sympathetic ardour.

Ruskin has himself given us in *Præterita* (iii. 13) an

account of his own relations to the College—how he loved Frederick Maurice, as did every one who came near him, but found him "by nature puzzle-headed; and, though in a beautiful manner, *wrong*-headed, while his clear conscience and keen affection made him egotistic." Elsewhere he says that Maurice reconciled Biblical difficulties by turning them the other side up, like railroad cushions. This is an exact account of Maurice's influence, as we who listened to his sermons and sat in conference with him used to feel. His moral earnestness and keen sympathies with right and wrong animating one of the most illogical and self-contradictory minds ever met, combined to disturb, not to guide the beliefs of inquiring youth. And, as Ruskin and many of us felt, the College had neither head, nor system, nor principles, but went on with kindly, social, loose, and highly respectable orthodox ideas in religion and in politics. It grew into a very superior Mechanics' Institute, well supported and of a most useful practical kind; but not, in any special sense, Christian, and not, in any sense, Socialist, and with a minimum of the real working man.

In 1857, as a summary of his teaching in drawing, Ruskin published the *Elements of Drawing*, a little manual which had an immense success with the public; but which he subsequently tried to suppress or to supersede as imperfect and based on one serious error —the advice not to begin by drawing in outline. The author—who, we may remember, never regarded anything he did or wrote as quite conclusive and sufficient—was far from being altogether content with this volume, which was never intended to be used by artists as a manual, and was designed to train young

persons in the art of studying nature and observing natural facts rather than to train them in the art of drawing. In a subject so complex and subtle, of course all kinds of criticism have been made, as they may be made about any guide to drawing. But from the literary point of view, the book is a masterpiece of lucid, simple, apt expression in a subject of practical handling most difficult to explain with clearness. The result is that this little volume of three hundred pages, written to guide beginners how to look at things they want to draw, is delightful to the general reader, who may care nothing at all for drawing as an art, and may never wish to take a pencil in his hand. Such is the magic of style. And those who fancy that Ruskin could write only in turgid tropes and sesquipedalian descants, should take up this charming little series of letters to "My Dear Reader," with its graceful, naïve, simple directions, and learn, as the Preface tells him, that "the best drawing-masters are the woods and the hills."

Another delightful little book, the *Harbours of England*, had been already published in 1856. It contained that glorious hymn to the sea and to seafaring which is one of the most rapturous that Ruskin ever wrote, and is ever memorable to all who love our English element and those who live by it and on it. The book opens with that wonderful song of triumph to the Boat which I have elsewhere noted as a masterpiece of English literature—"Of all things, living or lifeless, upon this strange earth, there is but one which, having reached the midterm of appointed human endurance on it, I still regard with unmitigated amazement." "One object there is still, which I never pass without the renewed wonder of childhood, and that is the bow of a

boat," etc. There is in English poetry, not even in Shelley or in Byron, no more stirring ode to the magic of the sea and the rapture of the seaman. And then the volume, one now prized at book sales, as very rare and choice, gives short descriptions of some twelve of Turner's plates representing the harbours of England as they were to be seen in the reign of George IV., some eighty years ago, in the days of sailing ships, seventy-four gun men-of-war, and wooden piers. Navies and Harbours were more fitting subjects for an imaginative artist then than they are to-day. Full of fancy without extravagance, impressive without rhetoric, original without paradox, these subtle notes interpret Turner in one of his best moods as completely as the notes on Giotto interpret the Arena frescoes. The "Dover," "Sheerness," "Whitby," and "Scarborough" are admirable examples of insight into the mind of an original genius like that of Turner. And such a vision as that of "Sheerness" in 1826 is really a document in the history of England, now that the old Seventy-fours are become floating steel fortresses, and a yacht is become a sort of metal torpedo with two or three balloons fixed on to it.

These were years of varied activity. In 1855 he began the "Notes on the Pictures of the Year," which caused no small excitement amongst painters and critics, and gave no small delight and instruction to the public. It was the hour of Ruskin's acceptance as the arbiter of art with the world of culture and open mind. Carlyle, the Brownings, Coventry Patmore, were his close friends. He now gave frequent lectures at Museums, Schools, and Literary Institutions; and, though his subject was formally on some branch of art,

he was continually turning to the social condition of the workman and the practical life of the craftsman at home. In 1857 he lectured at Manchester on "The Political Economy of Art," which is now included in the volume entitled *A Joy for Ever*, and which is definitely a part of his second career as a social reformer. And he now undertook the formidable task of arranging, selecting, and exhibiting the enormous mass of Turner's drawings and studies which were bequeathed to the nation. There were nearly 20,000 of these fragments in all, crammed into portfolios and drawers. It was an exhausting labour of some six months, a labour which perhaps no one else could have performed so well. And Ruskin ultimately composed a catalogue of the whole series of drawings and sketches.

All through 1858 and 1859 he was constantly lecturing up and down the country, working at Oxford and at Cambridge, aiding to start the University Extension, and to decorate the new Museum at Oxford, preaching the new Gospel of art labour at Manchester, at Bradford, and Cambridge; each lecture becoming more definitely imbued with his growing conviction that Art in all its forms was but a manifestation of a sound personal and social life—that the *life* of the body politic was the dominant problem for us all.

And so, labouring incessantly at home and abroad, he finished his *Modern Painters*, of which the fifth volume appeared in 1860.

And here, at the age of forty, comes the great change in Ruskin's career—

> "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
> Mi ritrovai in una selva oscura."

For more than twenty years he had been battling to call men to honour—first, Turner and his fellows, Rossetti and his comrades, Giotto and the Primitives, Titian and the later Venetians, to send painters to nature, and to make architects respect the freedom of their workmen. He had won a place in the foremost ranks of literature, and had a great and growing reputation as writer, as critic, as teacher, and as draughtsman. But he had been forced by his intercourse with peasants abroad and workmen at home to feel how all this was naught whilst our social and industrial life was full of sores. And he retired, as it were, into a wilderness to meditate—"che la diritta via era smarrita."

CHAPTER VIII

AS SOCIAL REFORMER

THE year 1860, the year of great crisis in the history of Europe and of America, the exact middle year of Ruskin's life, with forty years behind him and forty years yet to come, was the year of the formal opening of his career in social reform by the publication of his four essays in the *Cornhill Magazine*, now known as *Unto this Last*. When published as a volume in 1862, he characteristically declared these essays "reprobated in a violent manner by most of the readers they met with," to be, not a whit the less, "the truest, rightest-worded, and most serviceable things I have ever written." The real gist and aim of them being to give an accurate and stable definition of *Wealth*, and to show that its only true basis lay in certain moral conditions of society; in a word, that what is called Political Economy can be nothing but a corollary from a complete scheme of Sociology, or organisation of human society.

It so happened that it was in the same year, 1860, and in consequence of my own interest in these very essays, that I first came into personal contact with Ruskin himself. I had just been called to the Bar, but found time to join the Working Men's College, where I had lectured on the French Revolution. I

had read with lively sympathy the *Cornhill* Essays on the fallacies of the conventional Plutonomy; and being full of indignation with the mischief of those fallacies, I obtained through Dr. Furnivall an introduction to Ruskin, who most kindly welcomed me one Sunday to the afternoon dinner at Denmark Hill. He was then living with his father and mother in their fine house, standing in spacious grounds, and adorned with a grand collection of Turners, Coxes, and Prouts. I had long been an ardent reader of his books on Art, and had just returned from a prolonged tour in North and Central Italy, which I had known for many years. But absorbed as I was at that time in the great industrial struggles, and being in close touch with the Christian Socialists of that period, I had flung myself with hearty enthusiasm into the scathing criticism of *Unto this Last.* I thought it then, as I think it still, "the most serviceable thing" that Ruskin ever gave the world.

He received me with a radiant courtesy when I told him that I had sought him to hear more of his thoughts about Labour and Wealth. I recall him as a man of slight figure, rather tall (he was five feet ten inches), except that he had a stoop from the shoulders, with a countenance of singular mobility and expressiveness. His eyes were blue and very keen, full of fire and meaning; the hair was brown, luxuriant, and curly; the brows rather marked, and with somewhat shaggy eyebrows. The lips were full of movement and character, in spite of the injury caused by the dog's bite in childhood. His countenance was eminently *spirituel* —winning, magnetic, and radiant. I remember him then as he was drawn in coloured chalks by G. Rich-

mond, in 1857, somewhat idealised, as was the wont of that painter. That one of the many portraits best recalls to me the sparkle and nervous restlessness of his manhood, and best conveys the sense of his sympathetic genius. How strangely different was this portrait at the age of thirty-eight from that sombre photograph by Hollyer in 1895 at the age of seventy-six, with the long white beard covering mouth and cheek, and falling over the breast down to the folded arms and clasped hands, with its rigid profile and aquiline nose, as of a man of sorrowful memories and hopes betrayed. To place the Richmond drawing of 1857 beside the Hollyer photograph of 1895 is to measure the immense changes which in forty years stamped their impress upon that sensitive soul.

In 1860 Ruskin was a man of slight but active figure, with an air of genial *bonhomie*, courteous and playful in his ways, inexhaustibly vivacious and voluble. He wore the famous big blue neckcloth and the old-fashioned frock coat and velvet collar, and was altogether unlike a gentleman-commoner of Christ Church of that or any other date. He spoke with a distinct Scotch burr, especially rolling the letter *r*. As I said at the time of his death, in *Literature*, Feb. 3, 1900: "He was the very mirror of courtesy, with an indescribable charm of spontaneous lovingness. It was neither the old-world graciousness of Mr. Gladstone, nor the stately simplicity of Tourgénieff—to name some eminent masters of courteous demeanour—it was simply the irrepressible bubbling up of a bright nature full to the brim with enthusiasm, chivalry, and affection. No boy could blurt out all that he enjoyed and wanted with more artless freedom; no girl could be

more humble, modest, and unassuming. His ideas, his admiration, and his fears seemed to flash out of his spirit and escape his control. But (in private life) it was always what he loved, not what he hated, that roused his interest. Now all this was extraordinary in one who, in writing, treated what he hated and scorned with really savage violence, who used such bitter words even in letters to his best friends, who is usually charged with inordinate arrogance and conceit. The world must judge his writings as they stand. I can only say that, in personal intercourse, I have never known him, in full health, betrayed into a harsh word, or an ungracious phrase, or an unkind judgment, or a trace of egotism. Face to face, he was the humblest, most willing, and patient of listeners, always deferring to the judgment of others in things wherein he did not profess to be a student, and anxious only to learn. No doubt in all this there was no little of Socratic *ironeia*, as when he asked me to tell him what Plato had written about the order of society, and in which of his works.

Not only was he in social intercourse one of the most courteous and sweetest of friends, but he was in manner one of the most fascinating and impressive beings whom I ever met. I have talked with Carlyle and Tennyson, with Victor Hugo and Mazzini, with Garibaldi and with Gambetta, with John Bright and with Robert Browning, but no one of these ever impressed me more vividly with a sense of intense personality, with the inexplicable light of genius which seemed to well up spontaneously from heart and brain. It remains a psychological puzzle how one who could write with passion and scorn such as Carlyle and Byron

never reached, who in print was so often *Athanasius contra mundum*, who opened every written assertion with "I know," was in private life one of the gentlest, gayest, humblest of men.

I incline to think that the violence and arrogance which were imputed to him came of a kind of literary *œstrus*, which he never attempted to control. He let himself go, as perhaps no writer since Burke ever has done. Vehement language was with Ruskin a literary intoxication rather than a moral fault. He has paid a bitter penalty for failing to overcome the tendency. To paraphrase an absurd epigram about Oliver Goldsmith's talk and his books, it might be said of Ruskin that he talked like an angel and wrote as if he were one of the Major Prophets.

The relations between John and his parents were amongst the most beautiful things that dwell in my memory. Towering as he did by his genius above his parents, who neither understood nor sympathised with his second career (dating from *Unto this Last*), he invariably behaved towards them with the most affectionate deference. He submitted without a murmur to the rule of the house, which, on the Sabbath day, covered his beloved Turners with dark screens. This man, well past middle life, in all the renown of his principal works, who for a score of years had been one of the chief forces in the literature of the century, continued to show an almost childlike docility towards his father and his mother, respecting their complaints and remonstrances, and gracefully submitting to be corrected by their worldly wisdom and larger experience. John James Ruskin, the father, was a man of rare force of character, shrewd, practical, generous, and,

for all his conventional and bourgeois prejudices, with sound ideals both in art and in life. With unbounded trust in the genius of his son, he felt deeply how much the son had yet to learn. He would ask an Oxford scholar if he could not "put John in the way of some scientific study of Political Economy," to doubt which, in the old merchant's eyes, was to be sceptical as to Creation. "John! John!" he would cry out, "what nonsense you're talking!" when John was off on one of his magnificent paradoxes, unintelligible as Pindar to the sober Scotch merchant. Intellectually, the father was the very antithesis of the son. He was strongest where his brilliant son was weakest. There were moments when the father seemed the stronger in sense, breadth, and hold on realities. And when John was turned of forty, the father still seemed something of his tutor, his guide, his support.

Such was the man who, in the pages of the *Cornhill Magazine*, then edited by his friend Thackeray, undertook, with all the sublime faith in himself of the Knight of La Mancha, to demolish the solid array of what had held the field for two generations as Political Economy, *i.e.* the consolidated and rigid doctrine of Ricardo, Malthus, and M'Culloch. Ruskin's assault was not quite strictly original. Carlyle, whom he called his master, had continually poured forth his epigrams, sarcasm, and nicknames about the "dismal science" and its professors. Dickens, Kingsley, and other romancers, had fiercely inveighed against the Gradgrind philosophy of labour and the moral and social curse it involved. Maurice and the Christian Socialists were full of indignation with the plutonomy of the orthodox economists from whom John Stuart Mill to

a great extent had dissociated himself. The correspondence between Mill and Comte, and Comte's own *Polity*, show how entirely alien to plutonomic orthodoxy was the Positive Philosophy; but of this John Ruskin was in 1860, and remained all his life, perfectly ignorant. But he was saturated with the thought of Carlyle, and he was in close touch with Maurice and his friends, and both of these men were in touch with the revolutionists and socialists whom the European events between 1848 and 1860 made familiar to thoughtful Englishmen. Ruskin was thus not by any means the first to throw doubts over the gospel of Ricardo and M'Culloch. But he was no doubt the first to open fire on the very creed and decalogue of that gospel, and he certainly was the first to put those doubts and criticisms into trenchant literary form such as long stirred the general public as with a trumpet note.

The four essays, so characteristically entitled—"The Roots of Honour," "The Veins of Wealth," "*Qui judicatis Terram*," "*Ad Valorem*," open with this trenchant sentence:—

> "Among the delusions which at different periods have possessed themselves of the minds of large masses of the human race, perhaps the most curious—certainly the least creditable—is the modern *soi-disant* science of political economy, based on the idea that an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of the influence of social affection."

This crucial truth, if we understand it as meaning that a science of wealth cannot be carried beyond a few corollary deductions of special application, drawn from a comprehensive system of social economy at large, that is, a true "philosophy of society," had never

before been stated so boldly and so dogmatically except by Auguste Comte. As Professor Ingram well puts it, Comte's argument was, that "a separate economic science is, strictly speaking, an impossibility, as representing only one portion of a complex organism, all whose parts and their actions are in constant relation of correspondence and reciprocal modification." But of this, which had been stated a generation before him, Ruskin had never heard; nor would he have put it in any way so systematic if he had heard.

Ruskin rushed at the problem wholly from the mediæval, sentimental, and social point of view; but he grasped the root of the matter keenly, and argued it with his glowing style. He does not deny the conclusions of the science if its assumptions are admitted. But they are as void of practical interest to human society as would be a science of gymnastics which assumed that men had no skeletons. Modern political economy, he says, assumes that human beings are all skeleton, and "founds an ossifiant theory of progress on this negation of a soul; and having shown the utmost that may be made of bones, and constructed a number of interesting geometrical figures with death's heads and humeri, successfully proves the inconvenience of the reappearance of a soul among these corpuscular structures."

In its theory of Labour and Production, the orthodox political economy, he says, assumes that the servant is an engine of which the motive power is steam or some calculable force. On the contrary, "he is an engine whose motive power is a Soul; and the force of this very peculiar agent, as an unknown quantity, enters

into all the political economist's equations, without his knowledge, and falsifies every one of their results." No doubt, so far as human beings, whether controlling capital or controlled by it, are continuously moved by some calculable force, and for the time exclude any other influence, the deductions of the plutonomists are sound and real. But in any healthy society of men this state of things can only be temporary in duration and limited in scope.

The little volume of 170 pages abounds in memorable sentences, which if not sufficient as science, are curiously suggestive for reflection. What do we mean by "rich"? In truth, riches act only through negation. The force of your guinea depends wholly on the want of it by your neighbour. If he did not want it, it would be of no use to you. The art of making yourself rich is the art of keeping your neighbour poor. A society of universal millionaires would have to black their own boots. "Riches is essentially power over men." "That which seems to be wealth may in verity be only the gilded index of far-reaching ruin, a wrecker's handful of coin gleaned from the beach to which he has beguiled an argosy." "Buy in the cheapest market?—yes; but what made your market cheap? Charcoal may be cheap among your roof timbers after a fire, and bricks may be cheap in your streets after an earthquake; but fire and earthquake may not therefore be national benefits. Sell in the dearest?—yes, truly; but what made your market dear? You sold your bread well to-day; was it to a dying man who gave his last coin for it, and will never need bread more; or to a rich man who to-morrow will buy your farm over your head; or to a soldier on

his way to pillage the bank in which you have put your fortune?"

Then comes that passage which I have always taken as a masterpiece of wit, wisdom, and eloquence. "In a community regulated only by laws of demand and supply, but protected from open violence, the persons who become rich are, generally speaking, industrious, resolute, proud, covetous, prompt, methodical, sensible, unimaginative, insensitive, and ignorant. The persons who remain poor are the entirely foolish, the entirely wise, the idle, the reckless, the humble, the thoughtful, the dull, the imaginative, the sensitive, the well-informed, the improvident, the irregularly and impulsively wicked, the clumsy knave, the open thief, and the entirely merciful, just, and godly person." And the whole closes with the words: "*There is no wealth but Life*—Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings."

That is the Political Economy of John Ruskin; in other words, the conditions producing material wealth are inextricably intermingled with the general conditions of a healthy and worthy body politic. This central and saving truth has never been illustrated with more incisive eloquence, nor enforced with a more intense conviction. It is not needful to enlarge on the errors and extravagances which mark this as every other work of Ruskin. There are things fanciful, even fantastic, though much less than in other pieces. The attack on Mill is both ignorant and unjust; for Mill certainly strove to neutralise the narrow field on which political economy is legitimate, it may be with poor

success. But Mill should never be confounded with Ricardo, much less with the Gradgrind plutonomists who treated the observed facts of a morbid society as having a moral and social obligation for all time.

It may be that Ruskin's definitions are too fanciful to be definite. And he indulges to the full his old Calvinistic habit of extorting philosophy out of texts of Scripture, which are interpreted freely to suit the occasion; as when he deduces the permanent antagonism between rich and poor from the Proverbs of Solomon — "a Jew merchant, largely engaged in business on the Gold Coast, and reported to have made one of the largest fortunes of his time." As to his petulant contempt of all whom he was denouncing, it is hardly fair to ask a man engaged in a battle with an army to exhibit moderation. No one calls Elijah conceited when he mocked the priests of Baal, nor was John the Baptist arrogant when he reproved Herod to his face. We must take the Reformers, the Hot-gospellers, and Prophets with a mission as we find them, and accept from them what we can.

The general indignation which these essays in the *Cornhill* aroused, induced the publishers to press Thackeray to suspend their issue. This was done after the fourth essay; and they did not appear as a volume until two years later. On the appearance of the volume, Mr. J. A. Froude, then Editor of *Fraser's Magazine*, admitted a new set of papers on "Political Economy" (June 1862). But, again, the public opposition was so marked that after the fourth paper they were stopped. They ultimately appeared as *Munera Pulveris*, 1872. This volume then consisted of six chapters, and was dedicated to Carlyle—"The Solitary

Teacher" of truth, justice, and godliness. It would be needless to criticise the most discursive arguments and apostrophes arranged under the heads of I. Definitions; II. Store-keeping; III. Coin-keeping; IV. Commerce; V. Government; VI. Mastership; and VII. Appendices about Things in General.

Munera Pulveris is the title taken from the line of Horace—*pulveris exigui prope litus parva Matinum munera*—the cryptic allusion of which so few readers understand. It opens with the trenchant proposition that Political Economy, as popularly understood, "is in reality nothing more than the investigation of some accidental phenomena of modern commercial operations." As domestic economy regulates the acts and habits of a household, so Political Economy (rightly so called) "regulates those of a society or State, with reference to the means of its maintenance." And on this text Ruskin proceeds to lay down a number of propositions, rules, and criticisms to regulate the action of society, at least in its active side, according to an ideal of his own. The book is thus far more constructive and more comprehensive than the former essay *Unto this Last*, though it rests on the same general idea that the orthodox economists assumed men to be moved solely by interested motives, whilst in reality men and societies are exceedingly complex organisms, and their acts and purposes can only be rationally understood when they are treated as complex organisms.

At the outset Ruskin, in his vague and fanciful way, does seize the root of the matter that there can be no rational political economy apart from a comprehensive Sociology. Of course, both the term and the idea in

its full sense are quite foreign to him and to his mode of thought, but he seizes the truth. A rational political economy can only be a deduction from a complete philosophy of society. With astonishing wit, eloquence, and ingenuity, Ruskin illustrates and enforces this text. But in *Munera Pulveris* he goes much further. It is largely *constructive*, and here he has to extemporise a social philosophy of his own. For such a task he was utterly unfitted by his very scanty learning, by habit, and by the cast of his mind. He can only throw forth a few suggestions, more or less echoes of Plato, the Bible, mediæval art, and Carlyle. Nothing less adequate as a coherent and systematic synthesis of society can be imagined. He, the self-taught, desultory, impulsive student of poetry and the arts, rushes in to achieve the mighty task which Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Leibnitz undertook — and failed, and which Locke, Kant, Hume, and Bentham touched only in sections. Looking back over the long succession of efforts to construct a systematic sociology, which as a complete scheme has only in recent times been planned out by Comte and by Spencer, it is difficult to abstain from censuring Ruskin for toying with a subject of which he was profoundly ignorant, for he knew as little of the literature of philosophy as of the practical life of our age.

And, unhappily, private and domestic sorrows had grown on him. His father was deeply grieved and disappointed at the heresy of his son, which seemed to him so wanton and inexplicable. The savage insults of the critics, echoing as usual the conventional opinion of the time, made him reckless and defiant. He became more than ever arrogant and dogmatic, and

repaid ridicule with scorn. And his habits of fantastic imagery, Biblical tropes, and interminable excursions were more prominent than ever. It is but too obvious, if we compare the work of 1863 with that of 1860, that the flame of indignation against social oppression and the misery of the poor, and his brooding over a state of things he was powerless to change, had already begun to induce that brain disturbance from which he suffered so long and so cruelly. Henceforth unto the end, yet far distant, it might be said of Ruskin as runs the epitaph that Swift proposed for himself, *saeva indignatio cor lacerabat.*

And the same ideas about a reconstruction of social institutions and habits were scattered, in a desultory and eager way, through the twenty-five letters addressed to a working cork-cutter of Sunderland in 1867, on the occasion of the Reform agitation of that time, and published under the title of *Time and Tide.* The idea of this series was to urge working men to consider, not merely the question of the suffrage, but the reform of laws bearing upon "honesty of work and honesty of exchange." As usual, he branches out into a mass of startling proposals and sweeping anathemas. A written statement of the principal events in the life of each family was to be annually rendered to a State officer; and there was to be an overseer, or bishop, for every hundred families to see that such account was accurately and punctually made. All goods made were to be certified by the trade guild, which would fix the price, and advertisement of wares was to be prohibited. Lands were to be granted in perpetuity to the great old families (John James, the father, surely approved of this), but they were not to derive any

income from these lands, and they were to be paid by the State, as the king is. In little more than two hundred pages, fifty texts from the Bible are cited and used to support proposed legislation. Early marriage is desirable, but marriages are not to be made without consent of the State, and bachelors and maidens are to have as rewards permission to marry at some future date. Every bachelor and girl who obtains such permit is to have a fixed income from the State for seven years from the wedding day. Large families are to be condemned—as indeed the very Malthusians teach.

It is needless to continue this record of a social Utopia as subversive as that of Plato, or Fourier, and recalling the Jesuits in Paraguay rather than anything in modern Europe. These "Letters" are indeed not so much a social Utopia as the passionate sermons of a religious enthusiast; and not more impracticable than those of John the Baptist, Saint Francis, Savonarola, or George Fox. Scattered through them are noble, wise, and memorable sayings—what Carlyle called his "fierce lightning bolts"—flashed forth from his "divine rage against falsity." Industrial co-operation "is better than unjust and tyrannous mastership"; but he doubts if "it be better than a just and benignant mastership"—that is, a society in which "the master, as a minor king or governor, is held responsible for the conduct as well as the comfort of all those under his rule." No great social change can ever be accomplished quickly or violently. "If you could pass laws to-morrow," he says, of the kind Socialists require, "the riches of the country would at once leave it, and you would perish in riot and famine." What a beautiful bit is that about the draught

horse used to shunt trucks, and so chained in the railway siding (Letter V.)—a creature whom he can never see "without a kind of worship," as he says in words worthy of St. Francis of Assisi. "A knave's religion is always the rottenest thing about him."

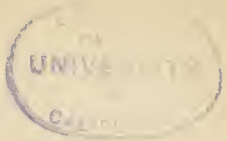
The account of the four modes in which the Bible is regarded in our day is true and admirably put; and here, perhaps, we get the first plain statement of the extent to which he had parted with his mother's rigid Calvinism. To hold that "virtue is impossible but for fear of hell," is to be in a hell of your own. Was the power of music ever celebrated in more beautiful words than these (Letter XI.): "Music is the nearest at hand, the most orderly, the most delicate, and the most perfect of all bodily pleasures; it is the only one which is equally helpful to all the ages of men—helpful from the nurse's song to her infant, to the music, unheard of others, which so often haunts the deathbed of pure and innocent spirits." A modern State is a ship where "on the deck the aspect is of Cleopatra's galley—under hatches there is a slave hospital," whilst even those who earnestly care to do any good can, with such difficulty, see the whole of the evil and the proper remedy, "that half of their best efforts will be misdirected, and some may even do more harm than good." What a picture is this of the tender and somewhat hysterical philanthropist, who penned words so true, so sad, so wise!

And now, as we look back across forty years upon these social Utopias which were met with such a storm of anger and ridicule, it is curious to note how many of them are familiar to our age. "We are all Socialists now," said a leading politician. And although Ruskin

is not a Socialist—indeed, he is rather a mediæval reactionist or an aristocratic absolutist, if label has to be found for him—there is in all his social theories that element of the ascendency of the State, or of Society, over the individual, the precedence of moral over material and practical aims, the necessity for organisation of labour, and a moral and spiritual control over self-interest, which is the fundamental essence of Socialism. Ruskin's ideal is a *Sociocracy* in Comte's sense; and, with Comte, he rejected both pure Democracy and abstract Equality, and stood by the old world institutions of Property, Government, and Church.

The pedantic, pseudo-scientific Plutonomy, or Science of Wealth, which he denounced, is as dead as Alchemy or Phlogiston. His notion that economic prosperity is subordinate to the wellbeing of the people is the axiom of politicians as of philosophers. His idea that the wise use of wealth, the distribution of products, the health and happiness of the producers, come before the accumulation of wealth, is a commonplace, not of philanthropists, but of statesmen and journalists. His appeal for organisation of industry, the suppression of public nuisances, and restriction of all anti-social abuses, is a truism to the reformers of to-day. So is much of what he said about national education long years before Mr. Forster, about old-age pensions long years before Mr. Chamberlain, about the housing of the working classes long years before the Statutes, Conferences, and Royal Commissions of our own generation. Read all he says as to the necessity of training schools, technical schools, State supervision of practical and physical education, help to the unemployed, provision for the aged, the recovery of waste lands,

the qualified ownership of the soil, the reprobation of men who "would put the filth of tobacco even into the first breeze of a May morning"—read all these glancings of a keen and pure soul from heaven to earth on a multitude of things social and humane, and you will recognise how truly John Ruskin forty years ago was a pioneer of the things which to-day the best spirits of our time so earnestly yearn to see. He is forgotten now because he went forth into a sort of moral wilderness and cried, "Repent and reform, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The kingdom of heaven is not yet come on us, perhaps is yet far off; but John was the Forerunner of that which will one day come to pass. He was not, as the mocking crowd said, "a reed shaken with the wind."



CHAPTER IX

THE ETHICS OF WORK AND OF ART

It was in his forty-sixth year (March 1864) that a great change took place in the life of Ruskin by the death of his father, and his own inheritance of a large fortune, the growing infirmity of his venerable mother, and the arrival in the home of his cousin, Joanna Ruskin Agnew, who eventually became Mrs. Arthur Severn, and remained beside him till his death. The seven years between his father's death and his mother's, and the final removal to Coniston, where he passed the last thirty years of his life, were years of varied activity and incessant lecturing, travelling, and writing, of domestic sorrow, of illness, increasing irritation and meditation, and a perpetual brooding over the social and political problems of that crowded time.

One night, early in 1864, on returning at midnight from a class at the Working Men's College, he found his father waiting for him to read to him some letters, and in a few days the old man was dead in his seventy-ninth year. He was buried at Shirley Church, in Surrey, and the son inscribed upon his tomb these words: "He was an entirely honest merchant, and his memory is to all who keep it dear and helpful. His son, whom he loved to the uttermost, and taught to speak truth, says this of him."

By his father's death Ruskin inherited a fortune of £157,000, in addition to a considerable property in houses and land, the whole of which estate the elder had accumulated by industry and sagacity in legitimate business. He was not only an entirely honest merchant, but a man of great generosity, of shrewd judgment, and of persevering culture in poetry and art. His erratic genius of a son, on whom he had lavished his wealth and his anxieties, had long parted from him in ideas of religion as well as economics. But the affection between them remained unimpaired; and so, John Ruskin had remained long past middle life, in his father's home, as it were, an indulged but dutiful lad, hardly regarded as fit to stand alone in this busy and practical world.

The aged mother, now in her eighty-fourth year, very infirm and with failing eyesight, needed some companion in the great house at Denmark Hill. So there came to live with her their Scotch cousin, Joanna Ruskin Agnew. She was a daughter of George Agnew, hereditary Sheriff-Clerk of Wigtown, by Catherine Tweddale, niece of that Catherine Tweddale who, in 1781, had run away to marry John Ruskin the grandfather. It was a family of cousinship; for Joanna Agnew was a cousin (in various removes, as is the Scotch way) of the Ruskins, the Richardsons, and the Coxes. Her brilliant gifts, bright nature, and loving care soothed the last years of old Mrs. Ruskin; and after the marriage to Arthur Severn in 1871, she played the part of a daughter to the later years of the son. In *Præterita* he tells us of her coming to his mother, of her "real faculty and genius in all rightly girlish directions," her extremely sweet voice, inventive wit,

and sense of humour. She stayed beside him from that first arrival at Denmark Hill, whether as girl or wife, for twenty-nine years, "nor virtually," he wrote, "have she and I ever parted since."

Having no specific work on hand, Ruskin devoted himself to lectures in many places, in all of which Art was made subordinate to ethical and social ideals. It was during this time that he gave the two lectures at Manchester, in 1864, "Of King's Treasuries" and "Of Queen's Gardens," which, with the Dublin lecture of 1868, on "The Mystery of Life and its Arts," was subsequently known as the volume so oddly named *Sesame and Lilies*, 1871. Why *Sesame and Lilies* I have never been able to unriddle. He introduces a quotation about a sesame (or oil seed) cake from Lucian, and a text from Isaiah about lilies blooming in the desert; but I fail to understand what "Sesame" has to do with the Royal Treasury, or why a "lily" in a desert is a royal garden —nor does it much signify. I remember hearing Ruskin give a lecture at the London Institution, which had been announced with the title of "Crystallography." He opened by telling us that he was really about to lecture on "Cistercian Architecture," nor did it matter what the title was. "For," said he, "if I had begun to speak about Cistercian Abbeys, I should have been sure to get on Crystals presently; and if I had begun upon Crystals, I should have soon drifted into Architecture!"

Sesame and Lilies, in spite of its title (Ruskin's titles seem to have had no purpose except to give the inventor of them a few minutes' amusement)[1]—*Sesame*

[1] Titles of books seem as meaningless as those of peers. The *Fortnightly* is a monthly; the *Nineteenth Century* is the

and Lilies is the most popular of all his minor works. My copy (of 1900) is stated to be "the forty-fourth thousand"; and in many ways it justifies that popularity. It contains some of his most beautiful passages, some of his noblest thoughts, and especially some inmost revelations of himself. It is pathetically dedicated to *φίλη*, without whose help, he says, "I should have written and thought no more." We now know that she was Rose La Touche, the child to whom he had taught drawing in 1858, who saddened his later life by refusing to be his wife, and who died in 1875.

"King's Treasuries" (which, being interpreted, means the use of good books, or solid education) is an eloquent plea against wasting time in the reading of valueless books, and the duty of making a select library of good and permanent books. This is exactly the aim of Auguste Comte when he published, in 1851, his *Positivist Library for the Nineteenth Century*, but of this John Ruskin had never heard. Carlyle said much the same at Edinburgh a few years later; and, twenty years after Ruskin, Sir John Lubbock made his excellent collection of the "Best Hundred Books." At that time, it may be remembered, Ruskin explained how he dissented from the selections made by Comte and Lubbock, and these agreed to a great extent. Ruskin put in his *Index Expurgatorius* all the non-Christian moralists and all the theology (except Jeremy Taylor and Bunyan), Lucretius, the *Nibelungen*, and the *Morte d'Arthur*, Eastern Poetry, Sophocles and Euripides, all the modern historians, all the philosophers, Thackeray, George Eliot, and Kingsley, Swift,

Twentieth; the *Quarterly* ought to be the "Grandfatherly"; the *Edinburgh* has been London for some hundred years.

Hume, Macaulay, and Emerson. Ruskin's "King's Treasury" certainly discloses a rather meagre exchequer.

In spite of this—and it must be remembered that, in 1886, Ruskin's brain had been more than once disturbed, and that he had returned to some of his old theological prejudices—*Sesame and Lilies* has many fine things exquisitely said. His scathing denunciation of the conventional upper class education "befitting such and such station in life"—an education which shall "lead to advancement in life"—meaning "the becoming conspicuous in life." "You might read all the books in the British Museum and remain an utterly 'illiterate,' uneducated person." How much would the bookshelves of the United Kingdom fetch as compared with their wine cellars? "Lilies" is a sermon for women. It has some beautiful thoughts on the women of Shakespeare, Dante, Sophocles, and Spenser, and some less obvious praise of Scott's women. He says, almost exactly in the words used by Comte many years before him: "Each sex has what the other has not; each completes the other, and is completed by the other; they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give." And in words of exquisite grace he sketches for the girl an education, and for the woman a career, which his Socialist admirers have found perilously akin to that of Auguste Comte.

The last lecture, given at Dublin in 1868, well entitled "The Mystery of Life and its Arts," is the most important, most personal, and most thoughtful of all; indeed, its sixty pages contain much of Ruskin's most memorable work. It is full of sadness, of religious

musing, and of passionate exhortation to work out a social reformation, to feel the mystery and the power that lies dormant in each human soul, and more passionate reprobation of the materialism and selfishness which society breeds in our generation so as to hide that mystery and to pervert that power. The homily is full of personal confessions, of disappointment, and failure. It is a sad tale. The ten best years of his life given to Turner had proved in vain. The years he had given to painting and to architecture had been wasted, for the social diseases of our age had made men incurably blind to the higher uses of either art. The arts can never be right unless their *motive* is right. And modern civilisation makes us insensitive to high motives and apathetic to noble aims. "The reckless luxury, the deforming mechanism, and the squalid misery of modern cities" make great art an impossibility, and thought given to it a mockery.

From the date of his father's death and his own responsibility for a large fortune, the public rejection of his social and economic teaching, the chorus of ridicule poured on him when he turned from æsthetic criticism to life, society, and politics, the loneliness of his life and idiosyncrasy deepened his natural turn towards melancholy, and it is especially marked in *Sesame and Lilies*. He wrote to his mother in 1867, "I have the secret of extracting sadness from all things instead of joy." He wrote to C. Eliot Norton from Switzerland, "The loneliness is very very great, and the peace in which I am at present is only as if I had buried myself in a tuft of grass on a battlefield wet with blood." "Swift is very like me," he wrote in 1869—words how full of pathos and of truth. And that most

strange bit of autobiography (*Sesame*, Preface, 21 par.) which ends, that "in my enforced and accidental temper, and thoughts of things and of people," he has sympathy with Dean Swift of all people. Strange parallel, singular coincidences! The most drab-coloured with the most purple of all great masters of English; the most cynical with the most idealist maker of Utopias; the most foul with the most prudish of writers; the keenest politician with the most unpractical of dreamers; the bitterest hater with the most loving sentimentalist—and yet analogies in mind and in circumstance—they two so lonely in spirit, so like in their genius for sarcasm, so boiling with indignation for the people's wrong, so brave, so defiant, each gifted with such burning speech, both such Platonic lovers, yet so continually petted by good women, both once so much sought, often so hotly reviled, both ending in such a wreck, in something so like despair. John Ruskin too, in his last years of decayed power, could have said, more reverently and less arrogantly, as he turned over the pages of his earlier books, "My God! what a genius I had when I wrote that!" He too might have truly written as his own epitaph *saeva indignatio cor lacerabat*—yea, and could have added *et mentem conturbabat.*

All through the period between his father's death, in 1864, and his own retirement to Brantwood, Ruskin was continually lecturing in many places and on diverse texts, but practically on the one text of the moral bearings of Art and Life. Sometimes it was on crystals, or plants, or the geology of the Alps; now it was the education of girls, or reading, or war, or wages, music, dancing, or the future of England; but

it always came round to the same central lesson—healthful and happy life in an industrious and well-ordered society. It would be tedious to analyse all of these homilies—they were usually much more the sermons of a preacher than the lessons of a lecturer, and they are too discursive and heterogeneous to permit of being grouped. The *Ethics of the Dust* were a set of rambling talks given to the girls of a young ladies' school in Cheshire, professedly on crystals, but on many other things. For them he wrote songs to be sung whilst dancing, and with much of graceful fun, for Ruskin was never so much at home as when enacting the elderly playmate of young girls, much as the author of *Alice in Wonderland* loved to do. And now and then the play seemed almost like flirtation to the old-fashioned chaperon or aunt. In any case, *Ethics of the Dust* is full of the author's quaint humour and fantasies; and Carlyle, in his queer jargon, called it "a most shining performance"—"radiant with talent, ingenuity, lambent fire"—"with a poetry that might fill any Tennyson with despair." It is not recorded that the Laureate did feel the green-eyed monster within him on perusing the piece.

The *Crown of Wild Olive* (1865-66) was a collection of lectures on "Work," "Traffic," "War," and the "Future of England," given to Working Men at Camberwell, to the Bradford Chamber of Commerce, and the last two to military students at Woolwich. The wild olive was the prize of the victor in the Olympic games at Greece, and in the Ruskinian cryptogram it means "the crown of consummate honour and of rest," as he explains in a magnificent passage (Introduction, § 16). They contain some of his best

remarks on work, industry, trade, conduct, education, and honour. Interspersed (mainly in the first lecture given to workmen) we may find nearly sixty texts of Scripture, inwoven into the argument in Ruskin's figurative way. Though the whole book is more serious and more coherent than some others, it does contain specimens of his furious exaggeration and of his mordant wit. Of the first, take the description of "that great foul city of London—rattling, growling, smoking, stinking—a ghastly heap of fermenting brickwork, pouring out poison at every pore—a cricket ground without the turf, a huge billiard-table without the cloth, and with pockets as deep as the bottomless pit"—all this of one of the most historic, one of the most varied, and quite the most healthy city in the Old or the New World. Of the second, this may serve—"borrowers are nearly always ill-spenders, and it is with lent money that all evil is mainly done and all unjust war protracted." How all this comes home to us in 1902, in this age of Chartered Companies, Monster Trusts, and War Loans!

The *Queen of the Air* contains three lectures of 1869 on Greek Myths, Athena, Apollo, Hermes, Hercules, and the rest, which are mainly interesting as giving Ruskin's earliest direct study of Greek Art. They show, too, a knowledge of Greek mythology and a familiarity with Greek poetry which are truly remarkable, when we consider how broken had been his education in the classics. He analyses and illustrates something like one hundred allusions to Greek poetry, mythology, and folklore, and quotes Homer, Hesiod, Æschylus, Herodotus, Pindar, Euripides, Aristophanes, Virgil, Horace, and Lucian. Much of the symbolism

that he sees in the myths—or rather, forces out of them —is fanciful and without authority, but it is almost always graceful and suggestive. But in the midst of purely æsthetic interpretation of Greek imagery he perpetually falls back on Economics — on Capital, Crime, Labour, Land, Legislation, Money, Value, and Wealth. And though his topic is myths, he finds room to speak of some eighty-seven different flowers, half-a-dozen different animals, and more than a dozen modern artists.

His final estimate of Greek Art is a wonderful proof of taste and insight; coming as it does from a man of fifty who, all his life, had been a passionate devotee of Fra Angelico, mediæval cathedrals, Tintoretto, and Turner. The merits of Greek art, he says, are "sound knowledge—simple aims—mastered craft—vivid invention—strong common sense—true and wise meaning—and, above all, coolness, everlasting calm." Not that Greek art is so *beautiful*, but it is so *right*. All that it desires to do it does, and all that it does, does well. Its self-restraint is marvellous, its peace of heart, its contentment; "sincere and innocent purpose, strong common sense and principle, and all the strength that comes of these, and all the grace that follows on that strength." And yet, he will not give the crown of wild olive even to the Aphrodite of Melos, "who could not hold her own against a simple English girl, of pure race and kind heart." And the sweet cherub heads by Sir Joshua Reynolds at Kensington "is an incomparably finer thing than ever the Greek did."

And so these years passed in varied occupations—much travelling in France, Switzerland, and North

Italy, back again to his beloved English lakes, in geologising, drawing, studying minerals, writing letters, and continual lectures. In 1867 he was the Rede lecturer in the Senate House at Cambridge. His subject was the same topic on which he was now continuously absorbed—"The Relation of National Ethics to National Arts." It has not yet been published; but so far as we can judge from the reports in the journals, it was composed in a more conventional style than usual with him, and was more in the vein of a university sermon than a professor's lecture. He warned the undergraduates to remember "the infinite importance of a life of virtue, and the fact that the hereafter must be spent in God's presence or in darkness." To the Dons he said their prosperity must depend on their diligence in executing "the solemn trust given to them in the proving of youth—'Lead them not into temptation, but deliver them from evil.'" We trust this appeal to heads of houses and tutors was a counsel of perfection. His father always said that John Ruskin "ought to have been a Bishop." In spite of his own *nolo episcopari*, he was always and everywhere the Overseer of souls, and never more than in these later years. But perhaps some parts of this report may be the stenographer's commonplace.

In 1865-66 the sanguinary suppression of a negro riot in Jamaica, and the summary execution of Gordon by Governor Eyre, roused fierce indignation, and committees were formed to prosecute — and to defend Mr. Eyre. Carlyle, always on the side of martial law and against the slave, dragged Ruskin into the Eyre defence, which he warmly supported, and to which he subscribed £100. It was startling to some persons to

find the author of *Unto this Last*, this "merciful, just, and godly" person, on the side of lawless oppression of the weak. But his Tory instincts and the influence of Carlyle may account for this and much more.

In 1871, Miss Agnew was married to Arthur Severn and left Denmark Hill. In the same year Ruskin bought the house and property of Brantwood on Lake Coniston, "the finest view in Cumberland or Lancashire." In December of that year his mother died at the age of ninety, infirm of body, nearly blind, but still resolute in spirit, and mistress of her home. The son had loved her, submitted to her, and mourned her "with a surprising sense of loneliness." He buried her in his father's grave at Shirley, and inscribed over it, "Nor was dearer earth ever returned to earth, nor purer life recorded in heaven."

Ruskin, now almost fifty-three years old, was at last alone; he withdrew to a new and distant home, and a new phase of his life was begun with his career as professor at Oxford.

CHAPTER X

SLADE PROFESSOR—OXFORD—LECTURES

In August 1869 Ruskin was elected Slade Professor of Art at the University of Oxford, almost it would seem as a surprise to himself. In February 1870 (he was then fifty-one) he gave his first lecture in the Sheldonian Theatre. The crowds to hear him had been so great that the lecture had to be removed from the Museum, which was not large enough to contain them. In January 1873 he was re-elected for another term of three years, and again in 1876 for a third term. Ill-health and incapacity to fulfil his work forced him then to resign. Again, in 1883 he was re-elected in succession to Sir W. Richmond, but he resigned again at the end of 1884. His Oxford Professorship had lasted for upwards of ten years, between 1870 and 1884, and this latter date was practically the last of his public utterances; and, but for *Præterita* and a few casual pieces, marks the last of his literary work. Certain of his Oxford lectures, at least in the first part of his time and for those into which he threw his best, were as effective and valuable as anything he ever had done. His method was unconventional, familiar, often humorous, and always intensely characteristic. He usually had drawings, specimens, diagrams, and figures to illustrate his argument, and with

these he extemporised a rich flow of ideas, comments, and fancies. At the outset of his course, and usually at the opening of each lecture, he read carefully written passages, such as might be found in *Modern Painters*; but no lecture was ever left a mere essay formally read.

It has been well said that Ruskin as Professor fulfilled all the four conditions for which a Professorship may be used—research, ornament, general instruction, and professional teaching. If people outside thought that the office gave him new honours, if his family and his intimates always henceforth knew him and spoke of him as "The Professor," it is certain that all that was best in Oxford held that his part in it conferred an honour and a new force on the University itself. His Oxford lectures were ultimately issued in the books with the following titles: *Lectures on Art* (of 1870), *Aratra Pentelici* (1870), *Michael Angelo and Tintoret* (1870), the *Eagle's Nest* (1872), *Ariadne Florentina* (1872), *Love's Meinie* (1873), *Val d'Arno* (1873), the *Art of England* (1873), the *Pleasures of England* (1884). And by way of professional teaching he issued, for the use of travellers in Italy, a series of foreign guide-books: *Mornings in Florence*, *St. Mark's Rest*, the *Academy of Fine Arts in Venice.*

Mr. Edward T. Cook, one of the Professor's most distinguished pupils, and his biographer, tells us in words that are best recorded in his quarto *Studies in Ruskin*, 1890—

"The charm of the Living Voice in Mr. Ruskin's lectures was as potent as the influence of the Living Teacher. The published volumes of these lectures are amongst the more important, as they are the most closely and carefully written

of his works. But they convey to the reader only a faint echo of the fascination they exercised over the hearer. ['That singular voice of his,' Mr. Mallock says, 'which would often hold all the theatre breathless, haunts me still.']

"Mr. Ruskin is, indeed, no orator. His eloquence is studied, not spontaneous—the eloquence of a writer, not of a speaker. His voice, though sympathetic, is neither strong nor penetrating. Of action he has little or none. But one quality, which is essential to a successful speaker, Mr. Ruskin possesses to the full—the quality of a striking personality. No one who ever attended his Oxford lectures is likely to forget the bent figure with the ample gown—discarded often when its folds became too hopelessly involved—and the velvet college cap, one of the few remaining memorials of the 'gentleman commoner.' . . . The quaintness of his costume—the light home-spun tweed, the double-breasted waistcoat, the ill-fitting and old-fashioned frock-coat, the amplitude of inevitable blue tie—accurately reflected something of the quaintness of his mind and talk. If it were not for the peculiarly delicate hands and tapering fingers, denoting the artistic temperament, the Oxford professor might have been taken for an old-fashioned country gentleman. In repose, Mr. Ruskin's face has of recent years been furrowed into sadness; but the blue eyes, piercing from beneath thick, bushy eyebrows, have never ceased to shine with the fire of genius; whilst the smile that was never long absent when he lectured, lit up his face with the radiance of a singularly gracious and gentle spirit."

"The Lectures on Art," with which the Oxford courses opened, were among the most serious and thoughtful of Ruskin's deliverances. Art, artists, and art-work formed the text, the illustrations, and the digressions. In substance they were homilies on education, sincerity of life, noble ideals of conduct, and the spirit of religion. They are full of denunciation of modern vulgarity and avarice, of satiric touches, and pathetic wailing over the hardness of heart and coarse-

ness of tone in British society of to-day. They might have been sermons from a University pulpit rather than discourses from a professor's chair. The refrain of the first is the old moral that great Art cannot grow up in a rotten world. Whether the title be Art and Religion, Art and Morals, Art and Useful Service, it is the same theme—one that the founder of the Slade Professorship did not perhaps intend, but one that since the close of *Modern Painters* Ruskin had perpetually enforced, with more or less exaggeration, but with all the fervour that was in him, as when he said, "You live in an age of base conceit and baser servility—an age whose intellect is chiefly formed by pillage, and occupied in desecration; one day mimicking, the next destroying, the works of all the noble persons who made its intellectual or art life possible to it."

After this tremendous jeremiad, the Professor turned to Art; and in the course of Mich. 1870, now called *Aratra Pentelici*, he gave six lectures, more or less directly concerned with the relations of the arts to each other, about Idolatry and Imagination, in other words, ideals and symbols, likeness, and structure in art representation, and a comparison of the distinctive marks of the best work of Athens and of Florence in sculpture. These lectures, graceful in expression, fertile in suggestion, and original in thought, are a joy to read, and were a genuine example of sound professional guidance, both in the way of judgment and of research. They contain also some of his wittiest and some of his most eloquent sayings, and were illustrated with some admirable drawings, photographs, and diagrams. "Art, instead of being foreign to deep questions of social duty and peril, is vitally connected with them." He

is so deeply stirred by the European war (Nov. 1870) that he occupies his mind with the technique of Sculpture rather than general principles of Art. For illustration, he holds up a breakfast plate and dilates on its roundness, its rim, its ridge underneath, the one serving as continuous *handle*, the other as continuous *leg*. Then for ornament, the plate has six roses painted on its rim, and from the breakfast plate the Professor turns rapidly to the Porch of San Zenone at Verona, of which he exhibits a beautiful photograph; and thence, by a transition easy only to John Ruskin, we are taken to the lovely coin of Syracuse, the head of Arethusa by Cimon.

"There is no instance of fine sculpture being produced by a nation, either torpid, weak, or in decadence. Their drama may gain in grace and wit; but their sculpture, in days of decline, is always base." *Cela donne à réfléchir*, when we remember that the model for Praxiteles' Aphrodite was Phryne, and that Michael Angelo worked for the Popes and Princes of the sixteenth century. "The Greek school of sculptors is formed during, and in consequence of, the national effort to discover the nature of justice." One wonders that the very name of the Aphrodite of Melos did not remind the Professor of the horrible sentence of the Athenian Demos on the Melian people. "All the arts, founded on religion, and sculpture chiefly, are here in England effete and corrupt to a degree which arts never were hitherto in the history of mankind." This, by the way, at the time that Alfred Stevens was executing the grand monument of Wellington in St. Paul's Cathedral.

But in spite of these outbursts from a man whose intensely sensitive nerves were being daily torn to

shreds, we need not forget how much of truth and of charm is embodied in these fiery darts into the soul of Greek and Florentine sculpture. "The Greeks were the first people who were born into complete humanity"; they looked for the first time "with their children's eyes, wonderingly open, on the strange and divine world." "The first thing you will always discern in Greek work is the first which you ought to discern in all work; namely, that the object of it has been rational, and has been obtained by simple and unostentatious means." "The modern sculptor thinks in clay instead of marble." The Greeks perfectly moulded the human body and limbs; but they did not represent the face as well as any great Italian. Whereas, the Italian painted and carved the face insuperably; but there is no instance of his having perfectly represented the body, which by command of his religion it became his pride to despise and his safety to mortify. One must give a very strict meaning to the term "perfectly" in order to understand this dictum, so as to make the head of the Olympian Zeus of Pheidias short of perfect, as also the three Graces of Raphael or the Venus of Titian imperfect. But Ruskin evidently means that no Greek head known to us had the expression of Leonardo's Christ, nor had Titian's Bacchus or his voluptuous duchess the grand forms of Theseus or of the Melian Aphrodite. The Greek never expresses momentary passion; a Florentine looks to it as the ultimate object of his skill. A Greek never expresses personal character; a Florentine holds it to be the ultimate condition of beauty. The Greeks do not give ideal beauty—the Venus of Melos has dignity, simplicity, but not the

beauty of an English girl. Nor do the Greeks present mystery or pathos. The strength of the Greek was in Rightness—the thing portrayed in its simplicity. The Greek, in a word, is the author of all broad, mighty, and calm conception, and of what is subtle, delicate, and varied.

The Eagle's Nest (1872), a book which Carlyle liked best, was a course on the metaphysics of the æsthetic and moral faculties rather than on Art proper. It was so named in the same way of fancy, in that it contains much about birds, at least twelve different species being mentioned, and something about eagles. What eagles' nests have to do with the teaching of Art is Ruskin's secret. And this perhaps few of his undergraduate hearers (to whom they were specially addressed as definite studies) quite succeeded in solving. But as usual there is much besides birds in this course—Dr. Acland's dog "Bustle," the Alabama arbitration, armorial bearings and heraldic "ordinaries," two young ladies studying astronomy, forty texts from the Bible, the dangers of studying anatomy, dancing at the Gaiety Theatre, the famine in Orissa, dwellings for the working classes, drawing from the living nude, the Victoria Tower at Westminster, and the battle of the Lake Regillus,—all this in 240 paragraphs, and *à propos* (not *de bottes*, but) of Eagles.

The first five lectures are devoted to the Greek conception of σοφία, σωφροσύνη, and αὐτάρκεια, and they somewhat trespass on the preserves of the Regius Professor of Greek, and of the Waynflete Professor of Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy. But, given

Ruskin's fanciful and discursive methods, they have some suggestive thoughts in exquisite words as to the relations of Science, Art, and Literature, interwoven with some quaint references to Homer, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Goethe, and Blake, and some lovely fantasies about the instinct and songs of birds. The argument, scintillating as it does with bright fancies and allusions, is not very easy to follow; but it amounts to this: that the business of Art is to represent what is visible, not to give a scientific explanation of what a thing is composed of, what may be inside it and invisible, much less how it came about. Three thousand years have passed since the age of Ulysses, who resisted the temptation of the Sirens to "learn new wisdom," and we are still eager to add to our knowledge rather than to use it, passionate in discovering, every day more cold in admiration and more dull in reverence. And much more to the same effect, as the undergraduates so often heard from the University pulpit.

When it comes to advice as to drawing, Ruskin earnestly protests against any intrusion of science upon art; and here he obviously means science as professed in the orthodox method, for he throws in a great deal of science of his own devising. That is a capital story of the old sea captain who complained to Turner that in a drawing of Plymouth Harbour he had given the ships no port-holes. "No," said the painter, "you cannot *see* the port-holes. My business is to draw what I see, not what I know is there." "Art has nothing to do," said Ruskin, "with structures, causes, or absolute facts; but only with appearances." Hence the study of Anatomy is an impediment to graphic Art. Michael

Angelo, Botticelli, Dürer, and Mantegna were injured by their scientific knowledge of the skeleton and the anatomy beneath the skin of their figures. They continually would draw, not what could be seen, but what they knew was underneath the exterior. Mantegna and Dürer "were polluted and paralysed" by their study of anatomy. And even the study of the nude form, beyond what is shown in daily life, is injurious to the art of painting or of sculpture—for instance, Mulready's life studies are vulgar and abominable. This, it seems, on the ground that, though such studies represent what the draughtsman sees, they are not what the public sees or knows; and thus they disturb the mind with what is neither familiar nor pleasing. And it seems that, on similar grounds, the Professor would banish copying the antique from elementary drawing-schools. For a young boy or girl to stare at the Elgin marbles is enough to make the youthful temper "rotten with affectation, and sickly with strained and ambitious fancy." It is even worse for young persons to endure the horror of the dissecting-room, or be made familiar with the bodily form in climates where, owing to the use of clothing, the body is not perfect in shape, and cannot be viewed unclothed with entirely simple feeling.

When we come to *Ariadne Florentina* (lectures of 1872), we reach more strictly artistic studies; indeed, they are on the technique of Wood and Metal Engraving. They are mainly occupied with subtle analyses of the methods employed by Botticelli, Dürer, Holbein, Bewick, and Tenniel. There is much of refined criticism in all this, but it is far too technical to be here

examined, especially without those elaborate drawings and photographs which gave such interest to the spoken lectures. One shrinks from the task of reporting, or defending, or criticising the Professor's analysis of the engraver's triumphs and failures—often striking, sometimes fanciful, and usually suggestive, as it all is. Holbein's *Dance of Death* is a subject in which Ruskin naturally would revel. You may learn more, he says, by trying to engrave the tip of an ear or the curl of a lock of hair than by photographing the entire population of the United States of America. Unfortunately, all that the public demand of engravings to-day is Ramsgate Sands, Dolly Vardens, and the Paddington Station—that is the public itself.

The volume on German and Florentine engravers has far less of the disquisitions on Morals and Philosophy than the Professor's other lectures; but there is a striking passage, at the opening of the fifth lecture, which sums up Ruskin's feeling about the Renascence, or *Renaissance*, as he will call it, in the fifteenth century. Three great passions "then perturbed or polluted Europe":—

1. The thirst for classical literature, and the proud and false taste created by it when it assumed to be the enemy of Christianity.
2. The pride of science, enforcing accuracy of perspective, shade, and anatomy, never before dreamed of.
3. The sense of error and iniquity in the teaching of the Christian Church.

To put it more shortly—(1) Classicism and Literary Science; (2) Medicine and Physical Science; (3) The

Reformation and Religious Science. One may wonder where, without these great polluting passions, would have been Tintoretto, Titian, Turner, and Reynolds, where would Oxford have been, and where would be nine-tenths of the Slade Professor's own works?

Love's Meinie is the written form of four Oxford lectures of 1873. 'Twould be a pretty game to discover the subject from this cryptic title, and one hundred guesses would not unriddle it. In fact, it is about "Greek and English birds"—the robin, the swallow, and the dabchicks; and "Meinie," it seems, means "a many," or a bevy, or flock, or crowd; and to understand the full sense of the phrase, we must turn to the Romance of the Rose, Chaucer, St. Francis, and St. Bernard. The motto of the first lecture is:—

> "Il etait tout couvert d'oisiaulx.
> De rossignols et de papegaux."

In any case, it is a charming book, to be read alongside of Jules Michelet's *Oiseau*. But there is hardly one word in it about art, artists, or artistic studies. Beyond a casual phrase about Carpaccio and Holbein's drawing of birds, we get little about birds in Art, but much about birds in Nature. Paolo Uccelli and Antonio Pollajuolo are condemned as being too scientific. Benozzo Gozzoli and fifteenth century tapestry are not mentioned, nor is a word thrown to Raphael for his cardellino, his doves, and his cranes.

It would be a perilous task to examine the scientific accuracy of Ruskin's ornithology. He says that his two hundred pages are intended to contain the cream of forty volumes of scientific ornithology, and he has diligently studied the standard authorities upon birds.

But his business is to speak of what we can *see* of birds, of the visible facts of bird life, and especially of bird life as the poets, ancient and modern, have known it. And as a prose poet, Ruskin has thrown together a delicious body of bright thoughts about the birds whom he loves as well as St. Francis himself. The killing of birds is naturally the object of his most violent condemnation. The chief interest of the leisure of mankind is now to be found in the destruction of the creatures, not one of which can fall to the ground without our Father's will. It is becoming the only definition of aristocracy that the principal business of its life is the killing of birds, as Carlyle's epitaph on Count Zaehdarm in *Sartor* runs—*centum mille perdrices plumbo confecit*, "too often the sum of the life of an English lord."

There are no less than seventy-six birds spoken of in this little book; but, except quite incidentally, the singing birds are hardly treated, nor is there much more about the kingfisher, the swan, the pheasant, or the peacock. We must take Ruskin as we find him; and if he chooses to confine himself to the visible movements of a few common birds, and to a few notices of them in the poets, we may be thankful and enjoy what we get. The purpose of the course is to stimulate careful observation of birds in motion, of their action, plumage, and habits. The delight he feels in watching birds on the wing, hopping, dabbling, or diving, serves to draw off his mind from the cruel tale of social wrong and modern vulgarity which had so long settled on him. But there are moments when it breaks forth, as when he solemnly reprints that fierce passage from *Modern Painters*, vol. ii.; how he knows not of "any-

thing more destructive of the Christian character and human intellect than those accursed sports, in which man makes of himself cat, tiger, serpent, choetedon, and alligator in one; and gathers into one continuance of cruelty, for his amusement, all the devices that brutes sparingly, and at intervals, use against each other for their necessities." He repeats this scathing attack on sport after thirty-five years, and adds that every hour of his life since has increased his sense "of the bitterness of the curse, which the habits of hunting and 'la chasse' have brought upon the so-called upper classes of England and of France; until, from knights and gentlemen, they have sunk into jockeys, speculators, usurers, butchers by battue, etc., etc."

One cannot understand Ruskin's life, unless we realise how the graceful gossip about robins and swallows leads in his mind straight to this bitter anathema on modern life. Only, one wonders what the young gentlemen, to whom it was addressed, thought of it, and also what it has to do with the academic courses of a Slade Professor of the Fine Arts. But one reads Ruskin to little purpose if we do not feel that, to him, Art was dust and ashes, except that it meant true life. It may be that some of the young men listened to him more willingly than to those who directly assumed to preach the Gospel, when he closed this course with the words: "The inhabited world in sea and land should be one vast unwalled park and treasure lake, in which its flocks of sheep, or deer, or fowl, or fish, should be tended and dealt with, as best may multiply the life of all *Love's Meinie*, in strength, and use, and peace."

Val d'Arno professes to be ten lectures of 1873 on Tuscan Art down to the age of Dante; but it contains more about Tuscan History than Tuscan Art. Opening with a fine sketch of the marvellous influences of Niccolo Pisano, who brought into mediæval Europe the smouldering torch of Greek art; and then turning to John of Pisa, the Professor rapidly passes into the story of Florence and Pisa, Manfred and Charles of Anjou, all of which is touched in a suggestive, and somewhat desultory and mystical manner, with much about Dante, the heraldic banners of the city quarters, florins, palaces, towers, and Cyclopean masonry. A typical example of Ruskin's habit of discursive or "jumble" lecturing may be seen by an analysis of the eighth lecture on "Franchise." Franchise, of course, has nothing to do with privileges or suffrages. It is equivalent to *libertas*, not "liberty," such as Mr. John Stuart Mill's, nor is it "liberté," such as M. Victor Hugo's; but rather freedom from fear and temptation, obedience to law, the truly kingly nature, as that of our Edward III. or of Theseus at Athens.

The Professor begins by contrasting the Lion of St. Mark's at Venice with that of Niccolo of Pisa, *i.e.* the Byzantine with the Gothic; the Greek art being pious, the Gothic profane, for the Byzantines gave law to Norman license. Theseus is every inch a king as well as Edward III.; the function of a Greek king was to enforce labour; that of a Gothic king to restrain rage. Greek law is of Stasy, and Gothic of Ec-stasy. Theseus and Edward III. are warriors, as we know; but they are also theologians, didactic kings, rather philologians, lovers of the Logos, by which the heavens and earth were made. The Byzantine lion is descended

from the Nemean Greek lion. Theseus becomes St. Athanase. If a bird flies under the reign of law and a cricket sings under the compulsion of caloric, perhaps the position of a college boat on the river depends on law, and the *Dies Iræ* is to be announced by a steam trumpet? The sheets of the daily press in a single year would serve to enwrap the world. Read fifty-two lines from the *Deserted Village*. Greek Art is all parable, but Gothic is literal. Turner belonged to the Greek school; his scarlet clouds are a sign of death. Sir Walter Scott's Diana Vernon is a symbol of Franchise—"ver non semper viret." "What Diana Vernon is to a French ballerine dancing the Cancan, the 'libertas' of Chartres and Westminster is to the liberty of M. Victor Hugo and John Stuart Mill."

All this is put down in pure and lucid English, melodious and incisive, with wonderful flashes of insight and of sarcasm; but it is difficult to see to what it amounts in the sum, except it be a querulous diatribe against all that we call liberalism or science. And it is even more difficult to see how it could advance the study of the Fine Arts, except by some casual phrase about a carving or a picture. The incoherence of the successive ideas is carried almost to the point of nonsense. The separate sentences have a meaning, even if it be only mystical and fanciful, indeed they often have a pregnant hint and even a true thought within them; but they flash past each other with the inconsequence of the famous wedding party attended by the Joblillies and the Great Panjandrum himself. The lecture as a whole resembles the kaleidoscopic pictures of a dream, wherein no single incident has any relation to that which precedes it or that which follows it. It is but

too obvious that at this period the Professor's nervous system, overstrained and morbidly excited, was driving the brain at excess, and was leading this fine genius to an inevitable collapse.

This is more or less the character of the later Oxford courses of the Professor. The incoherence had been growing from the first. He never submitted to regard his chair as one in which he was to confine himself to teaching or studying Art. He was to be moralist, philosopher, lawgiver, prophet — or nothing. If he taught drawing, it was only to show how drawing was a school for the virtues of truth, industry, and obedience. If he spoke of painters, it was to show how completely independent of science great artists were, how impossible was it to paint without loyalty, sincerity, and religion. Original and heterodox as his science was, we come from time to time on intuitions of scientific truth, which strike us like those we meet in the poetry of Shakespeare or of Goethe.

Curiously scanty and desultory as his scholarship had been as a student, we are continually struck in the Oxford lectures with the range of reading, the subtle comments, and the force of sympathy with which he had reached the inmost soul of so many classical writers, both prose and verse, Roman as well as Greek. Nor has any Professor of Greek, of Poetry, or of Philosophy, touched with a wand of such magic power so many inimitable passages of Homer, Hesiod, Æschylus, Pindar, Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Lucian; or again of Virgil, Horace, and Catullus. The Slade Professor may have taught the students little enough of Fine Art by his oral lectures; but he gave even the dullest and most unimaginative of his

hearers new ideas of the place of Art in Life, higher ideals of both Art and Life, and an awakened interest in all that Art might come to mean, if it were lifted out of the meanness and trading spirit in which it is too often sunk. Here and there when he does touch on Art, there are some judgments on paintings and painters of wonderful acuteness for all that they look so paradoxical, as when he insists that Turner belonged to the Greek School. And when he is not thinking of art at all, there are passages of strange pathos and exquisite beauty. The startling paradoxes, falling in such inexplicable inconsequence, at least roused the mind of his hearers, and taught them things in ways impossible to the conventionally obvious. And the Slade Professor, if he taught Art only by stray crumbs that fell from the banquet of passionate satire on which his mind fed, at least planted deep in the hearts and brains of a few chosen men ardent ideals of a better world, and the yearning desire to strive towards its attainment.

CHAPTER XI

AT OXFORD—WORK AND INFLUENCE

THESE lectures, which we now have in some ten handsome volumes, charged with many hard sayings for all but esoteric Ruskinians, were far from being the whole of Ruskin's work at Oxford, and perhaps they are not the best or the most important part of it. All that he did or said at Oxford, whether from his professorial chair or in his drawing school, in his college rooms, or in the country round about, attracted more attention and exerted a greater influence than perhaps ever fell to the lot of any academic professor of that age. He founded a museum of art, organised a drawing-school, formed working and travelling parties, gathered students around him, stimulated, advised, and reproved them, more as Abailard or Roger Bacon might have done in a mediæval University, or as John Wesley or John Henry Newman did in the religious world. He trained some few competent draughtsmen; he gave a new outlet to the intellectual activity of Oxford; and he deeply impressed the mind of some men who have made their mark in literature, such as Arnold Toynbee, W. H. Mallock, E. T. Cook, W. G. Collingwood, and many more.

When he opened his course of lectures in February 1870, the throng to hear him was such that it could

only be seated in the Sheldonian Theatre; and, in spite of the fact that undergraduates have never been accustomed to attend professorial lectures at such hours, and were usually occupied by a strict time-table, the crowd of his hearers was continued more or less all through his Professorship, even at his last term in 1883. Much of this eagerness to hear him was no doubt curiosity, as is the case with miscellaneous lectures of the kind. And much of what he said was more or less unintelligible to some of those who came seriously to learn. But every one knows that the residuum of fruit in a lecture lies usually in a few pregnant seeds that chance to fall on good soil, and above all in the sympathetic personality of the lecturer. Ruskin's lectures flung about broadcast pregnant seeds, and his personality had a magnetic influence unsurpassed by any other of his time. Hence it is that his career as Slade Professor cannot be adequately judged by the mere reading of the books, where too often, in the absence of the voice and the illustrations, the want of consecutive thought seems so crude and unconvincing.

Ruskin from the first regarded the lecturing as only part of his duties. He at once undertook to organise a school of drawing, not to train men to make industrial designs or patterns, or to become professional artists, but to get some practical insight into the history of art and the methods of the great masters; but, above all, to train the mind and eye to the patient and close observation of nature. For the use of his school he gave a collection of Turner's drawings, and some by Rossetti, Holman Hunt, Burne-Jones, and many of his own, and some pictures by Tintoretto, Luini, and other

masters, and he added engravings and casts. Thus, out of his own purse, and by his personal labour, he formed a museum to be the nucleus of an adequate school of drawing. The school was but a very moderate success. It was not a thing which easily worked into the academic habits or curriculum. And from first to last the object of it was not to train Oxford students to make themselves artists, but to make them understand what Art can show them in its relations to Nature and to Human Life.

Besides the drawing-school which he so munificently equipped, he made himself the personal friend, guide, and tutor of the students who cared to come round him. As he said, truly and sadly enough, of lectures —the hearers come to be entertained rather than to learn—"to be excited for an hour, and, if possible, amused; to get the knowledge it has cost a man half his life to gather, first sweetened up to make it palatable, and then kneaded into the smallest possible pills —and to swallow it homœopathically, and be wise. . . . It is not to be done. A living comment quietly given to a class on a book they are earnestly reading—this kind of lecture is eternally necessary and wholesome."

So he gathered the men about him and got them to read. He started a library of Standard Books for popular reading, which he called *Bibliotheca Pastorum* —exactly the idea of Comte's *Positivist Library*, as it is the idea of Sir John Lubbock's *Best Hundred Books*. Ruskin chose to begin with Xenophon's *Œconomicus*, a good book too much forgotten; and this he engaged two of his pupils to translate. He was made Honorary Fellow of Corpus College, as well as Honorary Student of Christ Church; and Corpus installed him in a set of

rooms. To these rooms he sent his great Titian, his Raphael, the Turners, and Meissonier's Napoleon; and here he would keep almost open house to his intimates, working, talking, and exhibiting his specimens and treasures. There too he held a weekly breakfast party, and many a symposium about things human and divine, by day and by night.

One of the things most talked about, but of very small consequence, was the scheme of mending a neglected bit of road near Hinksey, out of Oxford. He had always preached the value of some experience of useful manual labour as part of sound education—the old monkish gospel of *laborare est orare*, the old Roman story of Cincinnatus at the plough, the old Greek honour of agriculture, and much also set forth in the Professor's *Aratra Pentelici*. So he called forth his young pupils to leave their bats and their oars for a space in order to take a turn as "soldiers of the ploughshare" in mending a farmer's road that nobody cared to touch. The Professor bought a stock of picks and shovels, sent for his gardener to show them how to dig, and gallantly set forth to do a little roadmaking in person. It was found to be rather Quixotic, and there was a good deal of jesting, for the road was rather a failure from the engineer's point of view.

There was more in the incident than was seen at first sight. It showed a few young men how inferior to an average navvy they were in an honest day's labour; and it might have taught the Professor himself, had his ears been open to teaching, that the arts and sciences cannot be improvised *de novo* by an amateur, however burning be his enthusiasm and however righteous his purpose. But the spirit of the

Hinksey roadmaking sank deep into certain minds willing to hear. "I tell you," Ruskin once said at Oxford, "that neither sound art, policy, nor religion, can exist in England, until, neglecting, if it must be, your own pleasure gardens and pleasure chambers, you resolve that the streets which are the habitation of the poor, and the fields which are the playgrounds of their children, shall be restored to the rule of the spirits, whosoever they are, in earth and heaven, that ordain and reward, with constant and conscious felicity, all that is decent and orderly, beautiful and pure." Mr. E. T. Cook, who was himself one of these students, tells us how the conviction of this truth led shortly afterwards to Toynbee's work in the East End, and to the various University "settlements" which grew out of it. All this was no doubt quite outside anything prescribed in the endowment of the Fine Art Professorship. But it was a work which very few academic professors have ever attempted—or could possibly have achieved.

The third term of the Professorship was much broken by his ill-health and acute sorrow and disturbance of mind, and after nine years of service he resigned his work at Oxford. Three years later his health seemed improved, and he began lectures again in March 1883 with the *Art of England*, and in the following year he gave the lectures called the *Pleasures of England*; but the continued strain on his mind and the growing irritability of his nervous system much disturbed the spoken course of this year. He had always regarded it as his mission to decry and oppose modern science, at least the modern form of teaching science, and that on grounds of morals, of art, and of

religion combined. It was with him partly the opposition felt by all synthetic philosophers to the pedantic specialism in fashion; partly it was a religious horror of the evolutionary and materialist ideas, as he understood them, in the science of Darwin and Herbert Spencer, Professor Huxley, and Dr. Haeckel; but mainly it was the cast of mind which made St. Bernard denounce Abailard and the Inquisition persecute Giordano Bruno and Galileo. The proposal to establish a physiological laboratory in the Oxford Museum, within which he anticipated the practice of vivisection, drove Ruskin wild with indignation; and, upon the vote for the laboratory being passed (December 1884), he summarily resigned, and he quitted Oxford for ever.

The six lectures of 1883 collected as the *Art of England* are, in many ways, the most strictly critical of art and artists, and the least encumbered with social moralising of any that he delivered. They are practically a continuation of his *Modern Painters*. They are marked with the same passionate admiration and much of the same scathing criticism. The name of Gabriel Rossetti, he says, should be placed first on the list of men who have raised and changed the spirit of modern Art. He was the chief intellectual force in the establishment of the modern romantic school in England. Rossetti is Tennyson's "greatest disciple." But then Holman Hunt, in his religious pictures, is even greater in sincerity and respect for physical and material truth. His picture of the "Flight into Egypt" bids fair to be the greatest religious painting of our time. The Professor then introduces to his hearers drawings by two American ladies and by two Italian

young men—more helpful and exemplary than any he had yet been able to find. This lyrical praise, at least of the two Italians, has hardly been accepted by the world. And the lecture closed as usual with a devotional invocation only differing from the best type of sermon heard from the pulpit, in the perfect simplicity of the thought and the exquisite music of the words.

Burne-Jones and G. F. Watts were the subject of the second lecture. The primary virtue of the Pre-Raphaelite school was the effort to conceive things as they are, "thinking and feeling them quite out"—a noble example of which is Millais' "Caller Herrin'." Burne-Jones has command over the entire range of Northern and Greek mythology above all contemporary designers in Europe. With characteristic subtlety and refinement the Professor touches all the elements and conditions of imaginative art. Burne-Jones, he says, is a chiaroscurist, whilst Rossetti conceives in colour only—the former preferring "subjects that appeal to the intellect and the heart through intricacies of delicate line, or the dimness and coruscation of ominous light." Of Mr. Watts the Professor has not much to say, except that he seems to have been hampered by attempting to make his work on all sides perfect. But his constant reference to the highest examples of Great Art in form and his sensitiveness to tenderness and breadth have ranked Watts among the painters of the great Athenian days, of whom Plato wrote in the sixth book of the *Laws*. As none of these works of the painters of Athens have come down to us in any form, the comparison is somewhat difficult to follow. The point seems to be that Mr. Watts is always trying to make things "more beautiful and more

apparent," and indeed that is the aim of most serious and conscientious artists.

The third lecture is in some ways one of the most typically characteristic that Ruskin ever wrote, and it is therefore worth analysing carefully. Its title is "Classic Schools of Painting—*Sir F. Leighton and Alma Tadema.*" It consists of some forty pages of quarto print. Of these, two are devoted to Sir F. Leighton, and about as many to Alma Tadema. About thirty-five pages are occupied with various things having no reference to these painters at all. He opens with a line of Horace, praises W. Richmond's portraits which "lead and crown the general splendour of the Grosvenor Gallery." By "classic" art he means anti-Gothic, and he takes Leighton and A. Tadema as good representatives of the "classic" spirit. The Greeks perfected the representation of the human body; the Northern nations very slowly and imperfectly attained to this skill. He produces facsimiles of illuminated MSS. letters from Monte Cassino, and compares them with copies of frescoes at Pompeii. The latter are obviously the work of a nation in the jaws of death. Greek art is to be studied only from Homeric days down to Marathon. This excludes Pheidias and the Parthenon —Gothic art is to be studied from Alfred to the Black Prince, in England; in France, from Clovis to St. Louis. The combination of Greek and Gothic is to be found in absolute balance in Nicholas of Pisa, and thenceforward up to Perugino and Sandro Botticelli. A period of decadence follows among all the nations of Europe. (But what about Raphael, Titian, Tintoretto, Leonardo?) But then out of these ashes and embers the flame leaps again in Rubens and Vandyke, and thence to the top-

most representatives of English art with Sir Joshua and Gainsborough. Thereon follows much about these two greatest and most English of our painters. How would their sitters look painted in the classic manner, with very scanty costumes? "The charm of all these pictures is in a great degree dependent on toilette." Luca della Robbia united the Gothic with the Classic School. A little girl of three went up to an Infant Christ of Luca's work in the Professor's room and kissed it lovingly. Sandro Botticelli's frescoes in the Louvre are also similar types in painting. At Venice too the professor was able to copy the St. Ursula pictures in the Academy. Portraiture was the destruction of Greek design, and good Gothic painting must excel in portraits. Holbein's George Guysen at Berlin is a perfect portrait, and so is the portrait in the Tribune of Florence, once believed to be by Raphael, but really by a much more laborious master. The portraits by Mr. Stacy Marks are also most valuable, and so were his "Three Jolly Postboys" and his "Jack Cade."

Twenty pages before we get a word about Leighton! Even he has something of the Goth about him, for he paints little girls with a soft charm peculiarly his own, and the Classics never gave us little girls. The Professor feels that he had no right to speak of Leighton's higher efforts, "which have been the result of his acutely observant and enthusiastic study of the organism of the human body," with which Ruskin has no sympathy. Leighton, of all our present masters, delights most in softly-blended colours, and "his ideal of beauty is more nearly that of Correggio than any seen since Correggio's time," with his gift of beautiful vaghezza. And with this diplomatic compliment to

the late President of the Royal Academy and somewhat ambiguous praise of his "Correggiosity" and "Vaghezza," Sir Frederick passes out of the lecture altogether.

As to Alma Tadema, admitting his wonderful technical accuracy and minute draughtsmanship, the Professor warns his pupils against his love of cool twilight instead of strong sunlight. One thinks this remark must be inverted by the reporter. Learn by heart, he says, the seven lines of the *Iliad* when Achilles shows himself on the rampart and Athene wrapped him in a cloud of fire. The Greeks associated light and cloud in their terrible mystery, as the University motto is *Dominus illuminatio*. Now, says the Professor, Alma Tadema's pictures of Roman life are always in twilight (?) This is strange news! The picture called the "Pyrrhic Dance" was like a detachment of black beetles in search of a dead rat. Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone? "This is the classic life which your nineteenth century fancy sets forth under its fuliginous and cantharoid disfigurement and disgrace." So much for Mr. Alma Tadema as an exponent of the classic art! The pretence of classic study is only the "continuing poison of the Renaissance."

Alma Tadema, like Leighton, dismissed, the Professor turns to other things. A thing of beauty is a *law* for ever, whether it be a *joy* is another thing. The beauty of Greece depended on the laws of Lycurgus; the beauty of Rome on those of Numa; our own on the laws of Christ. Listen to the story of a Tuscan girl, Beatrice, daughter of a stonemason at Melo, who, being a beauty, and a fine singer, was married by a rich farmer, when she showed great vocal powers. Miss

Alexander's book of Tuscan roadside songs has great value. The Ford of the Ox here in Oxford is a baptism as well as a ford; and the waves of it, as the sands, are holy. Your task is to *cross* it, staff in hand. On the other side is the Promised Land, the Land of the Leal—when you get your Testamur in the Schools.

This cavalier bowing out from the court of Art, of painters like Leighton and Alma Tadema, men whose immense industry and learning, consummate drawing and grace in composition, are familiar to all Europe, strikes us the more painfully in that it is followed by such enthusiastic praise given to Mrs. Allingham and Kate Greenaway, Leech, Du Maurier, and Tenniel, Robson and Copley Fielding. No one grudges words of hearty sympathy for all the delightful things these artists have given the world; and Ruskin in his passion for *enfantillage* truly anticipated the judgment of the civilised world on Miss Greenaway's lovely children. But to go into raptures over the vignettes of toybooks and the woodcuts of *Punch*, whilst casting into limbo with suspicious compliments men like Leighton and Alma Tadema as personifying the "poison of the Renaissance," and the "fuliginous disfigurement" of the nineteenth century, is indeed a melancholy example of fanaticism in its dotage. Leighton is ignored on the ground of his study of "classical" form—the very thing for which Watts had just been praised. And so Alma Tadema is an example of the "fuliginous disfigurement" due to the Renaissance, because he loves twilight, the very thing for which Burne-Jones had been praised for his loving "the dimness and coruscation of ominous light"—whatever that means. Ruskin has taste too fine and sincerity too real not to acknow-

ledge the splendid gifts of these two "classical" masters, though in somewhat ungracious words; but he chooses to pick them out for condemnation as both being men manifestly untouched by his own religious sentiment. In this he reminds us of a rabid monk at Naples or Seville denouncing "The Revolution." It is an offence, not so much against reason and taste as against morality and fairness, which no skill in judgment or beauty of language can excuse, and which even the approach of cerebral disease can hardly palliate. There is not a shadow of anything evil in any work of Leighton or of Tadema, even if it were true that their methods are limited or imperfect. To charge them as vendors of "poison" and "disgrace," because their ideas of beauty were formed on antique, and not on mediæval and biblical memories, is an ethical rather than an æsthetic aberration of mind.

It was violent injustice of this kind, with incessant self-contradiction and incoherence, deepening all through the perturbed period of Ruskin's life (1871-1886), which alienated men of sober and solid thought. "A voice crying in the wilderness" was a part legitimate enough for one who chose to face all its pain, as did Coleridge and Shelley, Carlyle and Tolstoi. But a University Professor of Fine Art had duties of a specific kind, and had accepted a task in an organised body of teachers. To make pictures and painters mere texts for a religious and metaphysical propaganda exclusively his own, to denounce and ridicule his colleagues conducting their special studies, and to make his chair a pulpit for a Neo-Christianity or Palæo-Catholicism of his own invention, was unfair to the founders and managers of the trust whose name he accepted. And all the more, as

it was done by a man who stood outside all known communions, who had no fellow-believers, and refused any dogma, formula, or communion whatever.

It could have but one end. And that end was infinitely sad. "What am I," he said in 1875 (*Fors*, Letter LVIII.), "to claim leadership, infirm and old? But I have found no other man in England, none in Europe, ready to receive it. Such as I am, to my own amazement, I stand—so far as I can discern—alone in conviction, in hope, and in resolution, in the wilderness of this modern world. Bred in luxury, which I perceive to have been unjust to others, and destructive to myself; vacillating, foolish, and miserably failing in all my own conduct in life—and blown about hopelessly by storms of passion—I, a man clothed in soft raiment; I, a reed shaken with the wind, have yet this message to all men again intrusted to me. Behold, the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Whatsoever tree bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be hewn down and cast into the fire."

Were words so poignant, so truthful in their self-reproach and self-abasement, ever uttered by a man of brilliant powers, whose whole life had been devoted to generous causes and noble ideas? Yes; such words may not have been uttered, but such despair has been felt by preachers, reformers, and prophets of old time and of all time—by Job, David, and Isaiah; by John the Baptist, St. Francis, Savonarola, George Fox; by Tolstoi and Mazzini. *Lama Sabachthani* is often the last cry of men whose life seems to end in ignominious failure, but whose very groans have a vital force long after they are gone.

CHAPTER XII

ILLNESS—DISAPPOINTMENT—RETIREMENT

To understand the nature and development of Ruskin's mind, it is essential to take note of the constant attacks of illness from which he suffered, and the degree to which these attacks reacted on his later literary work. And the story of his Oxford lecturing bears cruel evidence of the reaction of his physical weakness on his mental equilibrium. He was constituted from birth with a nervous organisation of abnormal delicacy, and at the same time of singular elasticity. It was a combination of ancestral vitality with intense sensitiveness to external shock as well as to mental impressions. Hence it came about that a man who (but for a few days) reached the age of eighty-one, who had been an indefatigable traveller for more than sixty years, and had written more books than any one of his time, was prostrated with alarming illness every few years of his life, and for years together was incapable of continuous work.

His own memoirs and those of his intimates record these incessant attacks of illness. When he was eight or nine, at Dunkeld, the child's life was in danger from a sudden chill whilst gathering foxgloves by the river-side. He seems to have had another illness at the age of ten, which kept the family anxiously at home. At

the age of sixteen he had a sharp attack of pleurisy, and was in danger for three or four days, his life being saved by his mother and one of the physicians who prevented the murderous resort to bleeding which the others wanted to practise on him. The early disappointment in love for Adèle Domecq brought on a state of depression which ended in the alarming hæmorrhage from the lungs at Oxford at the age of twenty-one. His University career was suddenly broken; we are told that "for nearly two years he was dragged about from place to place, and from doctor to doctor, in search of health." When abroad he had a series of fevers in Italy and in the Alps. Immediately on his marriage (10th April 1848) he was seized with another attack on the lungs; and having a relapse, he remained an invalid until August. The following year, in Switzerland, he was attacked with a quinsy, which caused his parents acute anxiety. When, at the age of forty, he broke off his art studies to devote himself to social problems, a melancholy brooding over the evils of the times took possession of him and never left him again.

Henceforth he lived much alone, or in silent meditation, for a period of many years. In 1862 he wrote from Switzerland: "The loneliness is very great." "I am still very unwell, and tormented between the longing for rest and lovely life and the sense of this terrific call of human crime for resistance and of human misery for help." "It seems to me as the voice of a river of blood which can but sweep me down in the midst of its black clots, helpless." Then came the death of his father, some years later that of his mother, and the break up of his old home. The years 1870 and 1871,

during the great European war, were full of intense pain to him on public grounds; and in the summer of 1871 he had that acute internal inflammation which nearly cost him his life, and gave his friends so violent a scare, as Carlyle records in a characteristic letter: "We were in a state really deserving pity on your account, till the very newspapers took compassion on us and announced the immediate danger to be past."

It is a painful story to rehearse; but it is impossible to form any honest conception of Ruskin's work without some knowledge of the physical and moral afflictions that he bore for the last thirty years of his life. And the facts have been made public by his most devoted admirers and most intimate friends, such as Mr. E. T. Cook, Mr. Spielmann, Mr. Collingwood, and others, and they are tenderly and truly described by M. de la Sizeranne and by M. Jacques Bardoux in French. No one can be a more faithful and loving witness than Mr. E. T. Cook, the authorised editor of Ruskin's collected *Works*, and the writer of the excellent memoir in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. He tells us of the intense strain of mind and of successive disappointments which undermined Ruskin's health from the time of the Oxford professorship of 1870. He was continually writing letters to the press on public incidents and engaging in acute controversies and denunciations on all sorts of subjects and with every class of person. Mr. Cook says: "He was like the living conscience of the modern world, and felt acutely the wrongs and wrongdoings of others. In no age could his sensitive heart have escaped these sorrows. 'Le pauvre enfant, il ne sait pas vivre,' was the verdict of his Swiss guide upon him. In an earlier age he might have become a

saint. In his own age he spent himself, his time, and his wealth in trying to illuminate and ennoble the lives of others. . . . 'It is not my work that drives me mad,' he once said, 'but the sense that nothing comes of it.'" A spirit of intense sensitiveness tormented by sympathies and regrets so acute, in a body torn by constant diseases, utterly lonely and disdainful of help from any one on equal terms, was marked out by destiny for a cruel overthrow of mental self-control.

And to this mental strain was added a private sorrow. As an old man of some seventy years he gave the world (in *Præterita*, iii. 51) something of the story. In 1858 (he was then nearly forty, and no longer a married man) a lady wrote to him to beg him to come and see her, and to teach her two daughters and a son how to begin to draw. He went. "Rosie," the youngest, a child of nine, came out of the nursery, stared at him and thought him very ugly, and "gave him her hand as a good dog gives its paw." She was a blue-eyed fair girl, with lovely lips and pretty hair, bright, saucy, and clever. She called her governess "Bun," and the drawing-teacher became "Crumpet," afterwards "Saint Crumpet, or "St. C.," otherwise, when they studied geology and extinct beasts, "Archegosaurus." The next year the family went to live in Florence, whence Rosie wrote letters to "Dearest St Crumpet," and signed "ever your rose," as is set forth in *Præterita*—clearly a very clever missie of ten.

Years and years passed. John Ruskin was perpetually occupied with romantic friendships with young girls and children, as he freely tells us with charming naïveté in many writings; but when and how he again saw much of the child "Rosie," he has not told us, except

that some ten years later (when he was just fifty) he had "Paradisaical walks" with her in his Surrey home, which she used to call "Eden-land" (*Præter.* iii. 85). We are told by Mr. Cook that the lady was Rose La Touche, an Irish girl, and that he at last asked her to marry him. She hesitated, though deeply attached to him, for she was of a severely evangelical school. "A little work of prose and verse published by her in 1870 is expressive of a deeply religious, but somewhat morbid temperament." She was shocked by the latitudinarian tone of *Fors*. "She could not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. To her the alternative was plain; the choice was terrible; yet, having once seen her path, she turned resolutely away" (Collingwood, p. 299).

It was in 1872 that she definitely refused to be his wife. She was twenty-four; he was fifty-three. They parted for ever. She fell into ill-health, and was evidently at the point of death when, three years later, he begged that he might see her once more. She sent as reply the question whether he could say that he loved God better than he loved her. He could not say he did. She refused to see him again, and died so. In presence of a tragedy so real, full of excruciating pain to two souls deeply sincere, yet with circumstances so morbid around it, as to which those who know all and those who do not know all will form different judgments, it seems best to keep silence even from good words. A French writer has said: "Il faut s'incliner bien bas devant ces deux âmes, assez fortes pour sacrifier, l'une sa vie, l'autre son bonheur, à la sincérité absolue. Le grand Corneille les aurait trouvées dignes de ses héros" (Bardoux, p. 139).

Whatever we think of his delicacy, of his prudence, or of his good sense, there can be no doubt about the bitter despair in which this clouded Ruskin's later life. He plunged into work; he curbed his tendency to doubt, or at least to publish his doubts. "The death of Rosie," we are told, "was the greatest grief of Ruskin's life. He suffered much from sleeplessness, and had unnaturally vivid dreams." He now fell in with spiritualists, and attended *séances*, where "mediums" revealed to him the spirit of his dead lady. Years before he had been profoundly impressed by Carpaccio's picture of St. Ursula in the Academy at Venice. He spent his days in copying it, then in studying the life of St. Ursula. "He fell in love with St. Ursula"; she became a spiritual type of all womanly virtue and grace. He lectured, he dreamed, he wrote about St. Ursula, who at last became mentally absorbed in the memory of his dead mistress. And St. Ursula, who fills so many pages of *Fors*, became to Ruskin much what Beatrice was to Dante.

A brain of such imaginative power, bound to a heart so morbidly sensitive, furiously seeking peace through indefatigable work, with the ever present shadow of blighted affection within and passionate abhorrence of the social misery around—here was a nature perilously near to a crushing collapse. All through the summer and autumn of 1873 he suffered from insomnia, unnatural dreams, feverish work, utter prostration of body and mind. In 1874 he tried another journey to Italy, where he had a dangerous fever at Assisi, and dreamed that he was made a brother of the third order of St. Francis. It was from Assisi that he indignantly refused the gold medal of the Royal Institute of

British Architects. Quaint fellowship—St. Francis, John Ruskin, Sir Gilbert Scott, and the "restorers" of ancient churches! His mental condition grew more feverish each year. He resolved to recast his books, and to recant many of his opinions. It is a cruel record—"a state of hopeless confusion of letters, drawings, and work." He says, "I can't *fix* my mind on a sum in addition; it goes off, between seven and nine, into a speculation on the seven deadly sins or the nine Muses." On Christmas Day, 1876, he had an attack of severe pain, followed by a sort of vision of the dead lady as St. Ursula, and he felt that he had recovered his lost conviction of immortality in a future world. Early in 1878 he was struck down by his first attack of brain fever, producing acute delirium, which lasted at least two months, but from which he seemed completely recovered before the autumn passed.

It was but a seeming recovery. He never quite shook off the terrible collapse of 1878, which the strain of work, disappointment, and reveries would from time to time partially renew. The pressure of real work, dreams of vast work still to do, continually excited that super-heated brain. At fifty-six he wrote about the "various designs of which he had been merely collecting material." These were—a history of fifteenth century Florentine art in six octavo volumes; an analysis of the Attic art of the fifth century B.C., in three volumes; an exhaustive history of northern thirteenth century art, in ten volumes; a life of Sir Walter Scott, with an analysis of modern epic art, in seven volumes; a life of Xenophon, with analysis of the general principles of education, in ten volumes;

a commentary on Hesiod, with final analysis of the principles of Political Economy, in nine volumes; and a general description of the geology and botany of the Alps, in twenty-four volumes. Here are sixty-nine volumes, to be written by a man shattered in body and mind at the end of a laborious life. They say Empire-builders must "think in continents"; the distracted Herod loved to "think in gold and dream in silver." But John Ruskin would think in Encyclopædias, comprising Man and Nature in one library. The catalogue of volumes may have been his playful trick of exaggeration. He was ever a megalomaniac, and never more so than when dreaming of what he was destined himself to achieve. But this mere sketch of works to come which he seriously made public is highly characteristic of the state of his mind; and all the lectures of his professorial time, *Deucalion*, *Proserpina*, and the rest, seem but stray jottings from his notebooks collected as materials for this vast encyclopædic scheme.

Early in 1879 he was forced by the state of his brain to resign his Oxford Professorship; and by way of a rest he plunged into the study of glaciers in the Alps, and into vehement controversy with Professor Tyndall, which was like the fabled combat between an eagle and a whale. At sixty, then, Ruskin retired to peace and study at Brantwood, his lovely home on Coniston Lake. It is one of the most exquisite spots in the Lake country. His old-fashioned cottage, a mile or so from the village of Coniston, stood on the spur of headlands at the north-eastern end of the lake, across which it looked on to the crags of the Coniston Old Man with its firs, larches, quarries, and fells. There

he gradually formed a garden of roses, flowers, and shrubs, in rough natural terraces, leading down to the tiny harbour which held the boats for the lake. By degrees the house was enlarged; a new dining-room, studio, tower, and gateway were added; and the copses, glens, and meadows along the lake were included in the property. Behind it the moors rise in a series of knolls, cliffs, and "fells," such as delight the soul of those who know all the inspiration they can bring to the thoughtful mind and to the jaded spirit. In this delicious, simple, and yet easy retreat, the last twenty years of Ruskin's life gently passed on, cherished by the loving care and devotion of his cousin, his almost adopted daughter, "Joanie," "Joanna," or Joan, Mrs. Arthur Severn; her husband, the son of Joseph Severn of Rome, the friend of Keats; and the Severn family of two sons and two daughters. None of those who have ever been privileged to enter it have known a home more entirely pervaded, as its very atmosphere, with grace, simplicity, and kindness.

The house, which at last was made roomy without being imposing, quaint and old-fashioned without being in the least "æsthetic" or "Morrissy" (for indeed it long retained not a few traces of the Georgian and early Victorian banalities), houses some exquisite remnants of his great collections. First and foremost, the glorious Titian, the Doge Gritti, two Tintorettos, a contemporary portrait of Raphael, portraits of Turner and of Reynolds in youth, each by the painter himself, portraits of the old father and mother, and of the child John by Northcote, with his blue sash, blue eyes, and "blue hills." Ruskin's own bedroom was entirely hung with the choice specimens of Turner's drawings, which

were so rapturously described in his various books. His own library had a case of exquisite illuminated manuscripts, some rare printed books, some manuscript originals of Scott's romances, written with the master's own hand in quarto pages at a furious pace, legible and very little disfigured by erasures; a few smaller pieces of Prout, Hunt, and Burne-Jones; and cases of rare specimens of minerals and precious stones. Until you had closely looked at all these things—the choice remains that had been saved out of the splendid collections of paintings, engravings, specimens, and works of art which he had lavished on public museums and libraries—but for these things, you would not immediately perceive that you were in anything but the ordinary comfortable home of a retired professional gentleman. Here, for twenty years, after life's fitful fever, John Ruskin sought peace—and enjoyed it; but for the unforgotten memory of what he had loved and hoped, of what he feared and loathed in the world, and the attacks of malady, from which he had no absolute respite.

Reports of the world outside, of the failure of his philanthropic schemes, of the divergent ways of friends, came in on him from time to time, and fired his brain again to white heat. In 1882 he had another attack of brain fever, but was able to travel in August, and to work at French churches, and again in the Alps. And, as his biographer tells us, in that year "the attacks of brain fever had passed over him like passing storms, leaving a clear sky." And accordingly his Oxford friends, with the present Sir William Richmond at their head, insisted on his re-election as Slade Professor, and he resumed his lectures there in March 1883. During

that year he lectured in Oxford, in London, and at Coniston. But these were his last appearances in public. He attempted to continue his Oxford lectures during 1884. He flung himself into a rhapsody entitled "The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century," in which the dull winter of 1884 was presented to a London audience as an outward sign, sent to reprove the blasphemous iniquity in which the age was steeped. His Oxford course on the "Pleasures of England" seemed, as it was prepared, so erratic to his best friends, that he was induced to substitute for them readings from his own earlier books. And when the vote for a physiological laboratory, to be attached to the Museum, was passed by Convocation, he suddenly resigned his Professorship for the second time, and shook from his feet the dust of Oxford, of academies, and of cities. It was but the warning of a new attack of brain disturbance which left him shattered and incapable of continuous thought.

Modern literature contains no outbursts of poignant suffering, no revelations of self-tormenting reveries that can exceed those wrung from Ruskin in these dark hours. Nothing has been uttered more fierce, more pathetic by Swift or Rousseau, by Byron or Carlyle. But in the groans of Ruskin there is no trace of personal shame, of wounded vanity, of cynicism, or of despair. It is the torture endured by a tender spirit, morbidly outraged at the sight of grossness and cruelty; it is a noble rage against vulgarity and wrong; a resurrection of the mediæval godliness of St. Francis and à Kempis, in a world which had no place for these saintly ecstasies. The mental and physical maladies under which these agonies of a pure spirit have grown

incorporated in English literature, cannot be ignored in any honest record of the abnormal life of an unique genius. But it becomes not one who has but looked on these afflictions from without, but partially informed and but half comprehending them, to describe them himself. We who stand afar off read with wonder his words, "like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh," but we cannot presume to analyse the mind from whence they come. Let us leave the sad record as it is told us by his chosen friend and disciple.

Mr. Collingwood was his friend, his secretary, and his biographer, with special opportunities to know and authority to speak. He says: "Over-stimulus in childhood; intense application to work in youth and middle age, under conditions of discouragement, both public and private, which would have been fatal to many another man; and this, too, not merely hard work, but work of an intense emotional nature, involving, in his view at least, wider issues of life and death, in which he was another Jacob wrestling with the angel in the wilderness, another Savonarola imploring reconciliation between God and man."

"These attacks of mental disease, which at his recall to Oxford seemed to have been safely distanced, after his resignation began again at more and more frequent intervals. Crash after crash of tempest fell on him, clearing away for a while only to return with fiercer fury, until they left him beaten down at last, to learn that he must accept the lesson and bow before the storm."

"All that I now remember of many a weary night and day is the vision of a great soul in torment, and through purgatorial fires the ineffable tenderness of the

real man emerging, with his passionate appeal for justice and baffled desire for truth. To those who could not follow the wanderings of a wearied brain, it was nothing but a horrible or a grotesque nightmare. Some in those trials learned as they could not otherwise have learned to know him, and to love him as never before." "There were many periods of health, or comparative health, even in those years." In 1888, Ruskin, then in his seventieth year, made his last journey abroad; but it did not revive him as the journey of 1882 had done. "Now, his best hours were hours of feebleness and depression; and he came home to Brantwood in the last days of the year, wearied to death, to wait for the end."

So, eleven years later, but a year or so before his death, I found him in his quiet Brantwood home—to look at just like Lear in the last scene, but perfectly reposeful, gentle, and happy, taking the air of the fells with delight, joining in games or reading with the family at intervals, but for the most part sitting in his library and softly turning over the pages of a poem, a tale of Walter Scott, or Dickens, or some illustrated volume of views, himself in a bower of roses and gay flowers; silently and for long intervals together gazing with a far-off look of yearning, but no longer of eagerness, at the blue hills of the Coniston Old Man, across the rippling lake, as if—half child again, half wayworn pilgrim—he saw there the Delectable Mountains where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.

CHAPTER XIII

SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS—GUILD OF ST. GEORGE

It was the work at the Working Men's College in Great Ormond Street which definitely turned Ruskin's mind to social problems and practical remedies, though strong indications of his interest in such things crop up all through his earlier books, and were very marked in the *Stones of Venice*. He had first joined the College in 1854, and there he had as pupils, and soon as fellow-workers, such skilled craftsmen as George Allen, W. Jeffery, Arthur Burgess, and William Ward. During 1854, -55, -56, and -57, his lectures on Art had turned largely on the forming of art workmen and the conditions of life under which, in modern society, such men could be trained. In 1857 he said, "The kind of painting they most wanted in London was painting cheeks red with health." All this drove him to face the whole question of Labour and Industry under the dominant Capitalist régime. In 1857 he lectured at Manchester on the "Political Economy of Art," now printed in a *Joy for Ever*, which, as we have seen, was essentially an indictment of the current views of Plutonomy. And all through the years 1857, -58, -59, he was frequently enforcing the same lesson, that the regeneration of Art could only arise out of a reorganisation of industry as now practised. *Unto this*

Last, in 1860, was the Biblical *Contrat Social* of our Tory J. J. Rousseau.

All the books from the close of the *Modern Painters* series down to the retirement from London repeat and expand this thought, and in the Letters addressed to the workman of Sunderland (now *Time and Tide*) he is consciously appealing to the labourer on his daily life in direct advice. But it was not until his accession to full control over the fortune left him by his father that Ruskin began to deal in large schemes of practical philanthropy. From the time when he first had money to spend at all, he had been generous to the point of being lavish. Rossetti, C. A. Howell, and many of whom the public knew nothing, were helped by "Ruskin the good Samaritan, ever gentle and open-handed," as an unnamed writer called him. The Oxford Professorship of 1870 first opened to him a career of the munificent and pious founder. He began with forming the Ruskin Art Museum, with Turners, Tintorettos, and drawings by modern artists, which he presented to the Art galleries of Oxford.

As Mr. Cook tells us, "His pensioners were numbered by hundreds; his charities, if sometimes indiscriminate, were as delicate as they were generous. He educated promising artists, and gave commissions for semi-public enterprises. He presented valuable collections of Turners to Oxford and to Cambridge. To the Natural History Museum he presented several mineralogical specimens . . . to many schools and colleges he presented cabinets of minerals or drawings. In some forms of philanthropy he was a pioneer. He established a model tea-shop. He organised, for the relief of the unemployed, gangs of street cleaners.

He was the first to give Miss Octavia Hill the means of managing house property on the principle of helping the tenants to help themselves. He shared as well as gave. He thought no trouble too great to encourage a pupil or befriend the fallen."

After the capture of Paris in January 1871, Ruskin joined a "Paris Food Fund," to which he gave £50. In November of that year he gave the University of Oxford £5000 to endow a mastership of drawing. He gave a relative £15,000 to set him up in business. And at Christmas he gave the tithe of his remaining capital to found the St. George's Company, into which so much of his money and his energies was destined to be absorbed. John James Ruskin at his death in 1864 left to his son, we are told in *Fors*, Letter LXXVI., £157,000 in money, besides pictures and houses. In seven years the son had but half of this left after his lavish gifts; and that half not long afterwards followed the first.

The first letter of *Fors Clavigera* was dated from Denmark Hill on 1st January 1871, and it announced his descent into the arena of practical socialism. "For my own part," he wrote, "I will put up with this state of things passively not an hour longer. . . . I simply cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like; and the very light of the morning sky has become hateful to me, because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where I know it not, which no imagination can interpret too bitterly. Therefore I will endure it no longer quietly; but henceforward, with any few or many who will help, do my poor best to abate this misery." On the 1st of May 1871, in Letter V. of *Fors*—a letter which

Carlyle hailed as "incomparable; a quasi-sacred consolation to me, which almost brings tears into my eyes!"—Ruskin expounded the scheme of St. George's Company. He undertook to give a tenth of whatever was then left him, and the tithe of what he might earn afterwards. They were to try to make some small piece of English ground beautiful, peaceful, and fruitful, with no steam-engines on it, and no railroads, with no untended creatures on it; none wretched but the sick; none idle but the dead—no liberty, instant obedience, no equality. On this Utopian Paradise society and industry were to be regulated on strict lines of a newly-ordered scheme, such as was described in the *Laws of Fésole* and in the subsequent letters of *Fors*. For this new phalanstery Sir Thomas Dyke Acland and Lord Mount Temple consented to be trustees of the Fund. But the public did not respond. At the end of three years only £236, 13s. was added to the original £7000.

He then set himself to reclaim some of the "slum" dwellings in London; and he made an experiment in some nine or ten houses which he put in charge of Miss Octavia Hill, who collected the rents, and in course of that duty learned to know and to improve the tenants. But ultimately he parted with them for £3500, all of which sum he gave away to others, as he said merrily, "like snaw aff a wa'." Then he took a house in Paddington, and started a tea-shop, to sell pure tea at a fair price, putting an old servant in charge. To the tea was soon added coffee and sugar. And we are told the shop did a good and sound business till Miss Hill took this over also. Then Ruskin started a gang of street sweepers to keep the

streets clean. But this Augean-stable task was beyond all the resources of himself, his friends, and his gardener.

The famous experiment in book-selling was started in 1871 with the first number of *Fors*, which was not to be published in the usual way, but was sold only by Mr. George Allen at a village in Kent. It was not advertised, there was no discount, no abatement, the price was sevenpence, afterwards raised to tenpence. In spite of these obstacles, thousands were sold of each number. Ultimately the system was extended and made complete. Ruskin had long complained of the methods employed in the book trade by publishers and booksellers and the business rules and understandings in use; and, with characteristic self-will, he resolved to be his own publisher and bookseller. His aim was to offer, without any middleman, or advertisement, or commendation, a sound article at a price that would pay fully all the workmen employed on it, putting aside all competition, trade usages, commissions, or rebate. The author charged himself with obtaining paper and type of special quality, and the utmost care and skill in preparing the illustrative plates. Mr. Allen, who had been Ruskin's pupil at the Working Men's College, an engraver by trade, became the manager of the great business which was carried on with marvellous success at Orpington, until to this was added the Charing Cross Road depôt as a London house.

For many years the whole of Ruskin's works were issued from Orpington on these terms, at the very high prices of thirteen shillings unbound for ordinary volumes, the illustrated volumes at twenty-two shillings

and sixpence, and the series also in fine bindings. That *Fors* should have been sold by thousands under conditions so troublesome and unusual, that immense issues of the costly volumes should have found buyers, was an extraordinary tribute to the author's popularity. As years went on, he was induced to see that to publish his writings only in forms which no moderate purses could meet was to exclude the very people whom he most desired to reach. And at last the system was modified. The books were printed in a style less sumptuous, and sold at prices more modest. Arrangements were made by which they could be obtained through ordinary booksellers, and the business of Messrs. Allen is now carried on under conditions more like those of a great publishing house. We are told that for many years the profits of Mr. Ruskin's complete works—and they number between forty and fifty, most of these in various forms and editions—amounted on an average to £4000 per annum. It was indeed all that he had to live on, and to continue his gifts, for he had given away the whole of his capital, and but for his copyrights, he would be actually a pauper.

Mr. Collingwood, who has special authority to speak on a personal matter of the kind, tells us that "fortunate it was for Mr. Ruskin that his bold attempt succeeded. The £200,000 he inherited from his parents had gone—chiefly in gifts and in attempts to do good. The interest he used to spend on himself; the capital he gave away until it totally disappeared, except what is represented by the house he lived in and its contents, and a great part of that went to pensioners, to whom in the days of his wealth he pledged himself

to relatives and friends, discharged servants, institutions in which he took an interest at one time or other. But he had sufficient for his wants, and no need to fear poverty in his old age."

The most important of all Ruskin's social experiments, that to which he gave his whole energy and large sums for many years between 1871 and 1884, was the Company, or, as it was afterwards called, the Guild of St. George. The scheme is so characteristic in its conception and in its form, and throws so much light on Ruskin's real nature and inmost ideas, that it is necessary to treat it in detail. Few apostles of social reform in our age have ever sought to put their Utopias in practice, or to found material institutions to embody their ideas. But in 1871 Ruskin, finding himself independent of all ties, a man of wealth, with a great reputation and powerful friends, resolved to devote his resources of capital and of intellect to give active examples of the New Life.

The New Life, as Ruskin conceived it, was to be—not so much an advance upon the Present as a revival of the Past. It was in spirit Mediæval, but purged from the cruelty of Feudalism and the superstition of Catholicism. It was to be neither Communist nor Monastic; for it was to carry to the highest point of development the institutions of hereditary property and of family life. It was to show the world Chivalry without War, Devoutness without a Church, Nobility without Luxury or Sloth, and Monarchy without Profligacy or Pride. The type was a knight's fee of the thirteenth century in Tuscany—as of some idealised Bellincion Berti of the *Commedia*—some captain returned from the Crusades who should devote himself

to good works and guiding the yeomen who called him lord. It was to be a glorified mediæval lordship, fully equipped with the order, comforts, and appliances of modern existence, but purged of its vices, its frauds, its base machinery, and its sordid habits.

The scheme rested on the central ideas on which Ruskin's whole philosophy was based—(1) That there could be no civilisation without practical religion; (2) no prosperity apart from labour on the soil; and (3) no happiness without honesty and truth. The task of St. George was to slay the dragon of Industrialism; to deliver the people from all the moral and physical abominations of city life, and plant them again on the soil of an England purified from steam, from filth, and from destitution. In this regenerated country there were to be no competition, no engines, no huckstering, no fraud, no luxury, no idleness, no pernicious journalism, no vain erudition or mechanical book-learning. There were to be three essential Material things—Pure Air, Water, and Earth—and three essential Immaterial things—Admiration, Hope, and Love. And in Letter v. of *Fors* (1st May 1871) he enlarges on the way to reach these six requisites of rational life.

The first idea of St. George's Company was to buy land which was to be cultivated by manual industry, and rear a happy peasantry, with education, amusements, music, and art, suitable to their intelligence. They were to be paid at fixed rates of wages till they owned their own land. Rich and poor were invited to come in, if they would work hard with plain living; or to subscribe, if they would be content to see their money diffusing happiness rather than bearing interest. For this end the rich were exhorted to con-

tribute a tenth of their income, as the Master of the Company had done; but, to his surprise and sorrow, none of those on whom Providence had bestowed the good things of this world took advantage of the offered investment. The scheme grew, and was developed and expounded for ten or twelve years in *Fors;* but almost no funds, and very few Companions, were added.

It is useless to attempt to describe in any systematic way a project which could not have, perhaps was not intended to have, any systematic form at all. But, to gain some notion of what it meant, of all the incoherences into which his dream plunged Ruskin, as well as of all the noble aims at which he was striving, it may be well to analyse the Letter LVIII. in the third volume of *Fors*, premising that it was written in the autumn of 1875, in the agony of the time when he was mourning the death of the girl he loved, who on her deathbed had refused to see him. Letter LVIII. opens with the second collect at Evening Prayer: "O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed," which he quotes from the Catholic service, complaining of its "adulteration" in the English ritual (by the way, Ruskin in his own version quite mangles the magnificent roll of this typical prayer). He breaks out into a furious invective against those who utter this prayer weekly, without understanding it, determined to put no check on their natural covetousness, to act on their own opinions, to do whatever they can make money by, to be just or unjust, and to thrust themselves into the "most betrumpeted booth in the Fair of the World."

In contrast with such persons, every one received into

the Company of St. George must write out and sign the following Creed :—

"I. I trust in the Living God, Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things and creatures visible and invisible.

"I trust in the kindness of His law and the goodness of His work. And I will strive to love Him, and keep His law, and see His work, while I live.

"II. I trust in the nobleness of human nature, in the majesty of its faculties, the fulness of its mercy, and the joy of its love.

'And I will strive to love my neighbour as myself, and, even when I cannot, will act as if I did.

"III. I will labour, with such strength and opportunity as God gives me, for my own daily bread; and all that my hand finds to do, I will do with all my might.

"IV. I will not deceive, or cause to be deceived, any human being for my gain or pleasure; nor hurt, or cause to be hurt, any human being for my gain or pleasure; nor rob, or cause to be robbed, any human being for my gain or pleasure.

"V. I will not kill nor hurt any living creature needlessly, nor destroy any beautiful thing, but will strive to save and comfort all gentle life, and guard and perfect all natural beauty upon the earth.

"VI. I will strive to raise my own body and soul daily into higher powers of duty and happiness; not in rivalship or contention with others, but for the help, delight, and honour of others, and for the joy and peace of my own life.

"VII. I will obey all the laws of my country faithfully, and the orders of its monarch, and of all persons

appointed to be in authority under its monarch, so far as such laws or commands are consistent with what I suppose to be the law of God; and if they are not, or seem in any wise to need change, I will oppose them loyally and deliberately, not with malicious concealment, or disorderly violence.

"VIII. And with the same faithfulness, and under the limits of the same obedience, which I render to the law of my country and the commands of its rulers, I will obey the laws of the Society called of St. George, into which I am this day received; and the orders of its masters, and of all persons appointed to be in authority under its masters, so long as I remain a Companion called of St. George."

The author of this Creed imagined that no sincerely good and religious person would refuse to profess and sign these articles of belief. But this is a sanguine view. The second article is the direct negation of the orthodox Christian view of the desperate wickedness of the human heart and the miserable feebleness of man. Besides this, the nobleness of Humanity, its majesty, mercy, and love, is, in a religious sense, the doctrine only of Positivists, and is repudiated by most sceptics and agnostics as well as by Christians. Article V. would be a stumblingblock and offence, not only to all who care for any form of "sport," but to almost all persons outside the pale of some avowed humanitarian propaganda. Whether Articles VII. and VIII. imply the obedience of Jesuits to their General, *perinde ac cadaver*, is not evident. But the saving clause that obedience is limited by what the Companion himself "supposes to be law of God," would justify the most stubborn resistance of any Puritan, Quaker, Covenanter,

or Anabaptist; and as the Master of St. George himself defied many of the ordinary ways of modern civilised life, a considerable latitude was opened to private judgment.

For example, he sought for the Company the power of holding land, but would not comply with the conditions required by law for registering the Company, though these were exacted simply to prevent fraud and waste. St. George was also to have its own coinage, though how this could be done without trenching on the prerogative of "the monarch," and breaking the law as to "coining," is not clear. The new coins were to be pure gold and pure silver without alloy. The wastage was of no consequence, though perhaps the new soft coins would soon be reduced to the form of boys' toy marbles. Rents were to be strictly required of tenants; but then they were to be lowered, not raised, upon improvements made by the tenant, and entirely used for the benefit of the tenant and the estate.

The great law of St. George was to be "no use of steam power, nor of any machines where arms will serve." *Tools* are not forbidden; and "arms" here means limbs, not weapons. The laws in general were to be old English laws revived, or else Florentine or Roman, but none but such as have been in use amongst great nations. The Government was vested in a Master, or General, with Marshals, landlords under him, and ordinary Companions, the type of the landlord being Richard Cœur-de-Lion. Ultimately there were to be Bishops and Centurions, but these were not to take account of opinions and spiritual things, but of practical ways of life and material conditions, honesty,

and conduct in general. The grand object of St. George was to be the accumulation of national wealth and store (the store being food, clothing, good books, good works of art, the poison being expurgated out of them), and the distribution to the poor instead of taxation of them. Prices, and even saleable articles, were to be fixed by the Government, at least a minimum price and a standard of purity; all bad food, clothes, or articles were to be destroyed. There was one delightfully droll law. Wine was allowed, but only wine that was more than *ten years old*. Away with your "Gladstone Clarets," "Bas Médocs," and such stuff! Surely there spoke the son of the old sherry merchant, "entirely honest," who would have none of your modern cheap drinks. Dress would be prescribed to mark distinction of classes; hereditary orders were recognised; luxury would be made infamous; and, if jewels were used, they must be uncut.

It is needless to go through all the prescriptions of St. George which are scattered over the ninety-six Letters of *Fors*, extending over the fourteen years from January 1871 to Christmas 1884. The noticeable point is this: St. George is not a social Utopia, such as was imagined by Plato, or Dante, Sir Thomas More, or Rousseau. It was an actually constituted body of practical reformers, into which a man of genius flung his capital, his energies, his reputation, and his very life; which lasted for twenty years as a working model of the New Life, and may be nominally and technically at work still in some form. And it was an experiment, almost impossible to classify, or to bring into comparison with any known type of social Utopia. It was to be fervently religious, without any consistent

religious creed except a Theism, half Biblical, half artistic. It was Socialist, in that it was to divert all production from a personal to a public use; but then it preserved and stimulated the institution of hereditary property and the ascendency of the orders who owned it. It was wildly anarchic in its defiance of all the habits and appliances of modern life, and yet it inculcated an obedience not found outside a religious order. It was to free Labour from the tyranny of Capital in order to put it under the tyranny of a discipline more stringent than that of a Jesuit school. The ideal would have satisfied St. Francis and St. Theresa, except that there was nothing ascetic in it, and also it was essentially concerned with laymen enjoying a hearty and beautiful life. It might have satisfied those who listened with rapture to the Sermon on the Mount, except that it extolled the splendour of Chivalry, submission to the rich and the nobly born, and a general zest for all innocent gaiety and beautiful things. Nothing, of course, ever came of St. George. But it will long live as the pathetic dream of a beautiful but lonely spirit to flee from the wrath that is, and to find salvation in a purer world.

One offshoot of St. George has been a real success—the Sheffield Art Museum, which he founded with such generous gifts and noble enthusiasm. A full account of it has been given in Mr. E. T. Cook's *Studies in Ruskin*, 1890. He started this in 1875 to be a collection of specimens of really valuable human work; he added specimens of art products to it out of his own collections, or bought by his own purse; and ultimately it has been taken over in trust by the Corporation. This is perhaps the only remaining result of any

importance of so many years of anxiety and toil, of such generous sacrifices, of such noble ideals which were embodied in the Utopia of St. George, the mediæval symbol of England, of chivalry, and of culture of the soil.

It would be an ungracious task to record the pitiful story of the industrial projects which grew out of the central company. How a small knot of Secularists, Unitarians, and Quakers induced the Guild to buy a farm for them to start a Communist project for £2287, 16s. 6d.; how the Communists discovered they could not farm; how two acres of rock and moor were given at Barmouth, and twenty acres of woodland at Bewdley, and nothing grew on either; how a homespun woollen industry without steam was started in the Isle of Man; how hand-spinning and hand-loom weaving were carried on at Langdale; how the May Queens at Chelsea were crowned and decorated; how, after seven years, the Master came to see that all *interest* on realised capital was usury forbidden by Scripture, an abomination in the sight of God and of man; how, finally, he came to act strictly on this strange delusion which, if generally adopted, would destroy the bases of civilisation. Rent of lands remained, he held, lawful and serviceable business, though rent is merely annual payment for the loan of Capital.

It would need a volume to recount all his schemes, projects, acts of munificence—his gifts, his indulgences and forgivenesses, his pets, his interests, his gardening, and his planting, his boating and his sailing, his delight at finding an old dalesman who could build, but could neither read nor write, his love of animals, of children, of women very old and very young, his

inexhaustible activity, and his yet more inexhaustible generosity, his power of attracting devotion from his friends and assistants. Mr. Collingwood writes: "He loves many things, you have found. He is different from other men you know, just by the breadth and vividness of his sympathies, by power of living as few other men can live, in Admiration, Hope, and Love. Is not such a life worth living whatever its monument be?"

Yes; and we must add, whatever its errors be, whatever its failures be. The ninety-six Letters of *Fors* contain the tale of a long career of failures, blunders, and cruel disappointment. They contain, too, the record of that damning perversity of mind and of character which ruined Ruskin's life and neutralised his powers, the folly of presuming to recast the thought of humanity *de novo*, and alone; to remould civilisation by mere passion without due training or knowledge; attempting alone to hurl human society back into a wholly imaginary and fictitious past. Yet, let us remember—

> "It was a grievous fault,
> And grievously hath Caesar answered it."

But there are some failures more beautiful and more useful to mankind than a thousand triumphs. It is impossible to weigh the value, or to judge the legitimacy, of a hopeless but heroic sacrifice. Those who die in a forlorn hope are remembered long years after their attempts have failed. The monk Telemachus, who rushed into the Arena at Rome and put an end to gladiatorial shows, was called at the time a meddling fanatic by the people who stoned him to death. So,

too, John Brown the abolitionist was held to be when his body lay mouldering in the grave. But his soul went marching along, as the herald of the cause for which he gave his life. How many centuries passed before the Sermon on the Mount bore fruit—long ages after the Preacher had been led out to death with jeers and spitting! And how mixed and dubious has even that fruit been found! In things social and religious it is the fervour of belief, the loathing of falsehood, the abandonment of every self-interested, and even of every prudential motive, which tells in the end. Magnanimity owes no account of its acts to Prudence. No; nor to Common Sense.

CHAPTER XIV

FORS CLAVIGERA

THE last two works of importance which Ruskin published — the last of his writings, except incidental lectures, notes, or memoranda — *Fors Clavigera* and *Præterita* — have a character quite unlike his main treatises, a character almost unique in literature. Both are mainly autobiographical; desultory, incoherent, self-revealing, personal to a degree of which there is hardly any equal example in our language; and they are composed in a style in strange contrast to that of the art studies which made the name of Ruskin famous in the whole reading world. *Fors* has been pronounced by foreign, and by some English, readers to be "unintelligible," and by some contemporary critics to be "crazy" and "grotesque." It contains much of Ruskin's most typical thoughts.

That the ninety-six Letters which now fill four volumes of *Fors* are fantastic, wayward, egoistic, as is no other book in our language—this is perfectly true. It is true also, and pity 'tis 'tis true, that some parts of the series must be judged to be, at the least, on the very border line that marks off rational discourse from morbid wandering of mind. The series of Letters, after seven years, was interrupted for some two years by acute cerebral disease, and was irregularly continued

some time later, with diminished power. But if we look calmly at all these ninety-six Letters taken together, we shall see a very definite purpose and plan of action running through the whole: the revelation of a mind of marvellous brilliancy, richness, and culture; of a nature of exquisite tenderness, generosity, and candour. *Fors* is Ruskin's *Hamlet*. And if there are times when incoherence seems to be passing into delusion, these soliloquies, tirades, and confessions vivisect for us a heart of rare passion and a brain of fascinating gifts.

Fors is indeed the typical work of the man John Ruskin, apart from his special studies and teaching in the arts. His whole soul is there unveiled to us over a period of fourteen years: for the most part the epoch of malady, disappointment, and decay—it may be, but the epoch also of his deepest meditations and his most ardent dreams. To his fervid disciples, his intimates, his fellow-believers and fellow-workers, *Fors* remains still his essential gospel or message to a perverse world. To the cynical critic it is evidence of brain disease and a nature disordered with Quixotic self-absorption and querulous nostrums of his own invention. More reasonable judges will agree with neither extreme. They will see, self-unveiled, a noble nature and beautiful aspirations, and they will see with pain how these rare qualities were debarred from bearing fruit by indomitable arrogance, and by a sort of mental and moral incontinence, which habitually hovered on the borders of sheer hallucination.

This is how *Fors* is described by Mr. Collingwood in his authoritative and elaborate biography:—

"To read *Fors* is like being out in a thunderstorm. At first, you open the book with interest, to watch the signs of

the times. Whilst you climb your mountain, at unawares there is a darkening of the cloud upon you, and the tension of instinctive dread, as image after image arises of misery, and murder, and lingering death, with here and there a streak of sun in the foreground, only throwing the wildness of the scene into more rugged relief; and through the gaps you see broad fields of ancient history, like lands of promise left behind. By and by the gloom wraps you. The old thunder of the Ruskinian paragraph, shortened now to whip-lash cracks, reverberates unremittingly from point to point, raising echoes, sounding deeps; allusions, suggestions, intimations stirring the realm of chaos, that ordinarily we are glad to let slumber, but now terribly discern, by flashes of thought, most unexpectedly arriving. Fascinated by the hammer-play of Thor, berserking among Rime-giants—customs that 'hang upon us, heavy as frost'—you begin to applaud; when a sudden stroke rolls your own standpoint into the abyss. But if you can climb forward, undismayed, to the summit, the storm drifts by; and you see the world again, all new, beneath you—how rippling in Thor's laughter, how tenderly veiled in his tears!"

Whatever this may mean, it will serve to show that the irrepressible incoherences, inconsequences, and gyrations of *Fors* are believed to have a real and very potent Gospel to expound under all their flames and scintillations. And in truth they have. *Fors* is not only Ruskin's *Hamlet*, but it is also his *Apocalypse*. But anything less like Thor than *Fors* it is difficult to imagine, or indeed anything less like the style of *Fors* than the passage just cited from his biographer. But the comparison of *Fors* to a thunderstorm has a certain meaning in this way. It produces on us the effect of some strange electrical disturbance in the heavens, which we watch with wonder and admiration, constantly struck by some unexpected flash, from whence coming,

whither going, we know not, but always beautiful and profoundly impressive.

As we have seen, the style in which *Fors* is written is utterly different from that of the earlier books on Art, in that it has not a trace of rhetoric, word-painting, or laboured composition in any form. It is throughout a masterpiece of simple, graceful, pellucid English, like the most easy and natural speech. It flows on in one fascinating *causerie*, as it might fall from the lips of a perfect master of the art of familiar conversation. In a second point, it is written in a style of which there is no other example in the language—a style of unmeasured *abandon*, of surrender to any fancy, whim, association of the passing moment. Nothing so utterly inconsequent, so rambling, so heterogeneous exists in print. And yet, the connotations of ideas are so fantastic, and the transitions so original, that the effect of the whole is charming as well as exciting.

The *form* of *Fors* is so singular in itself, and of a perfection of its own so rare, that it may be studied in detail. In the first place, in all these two thousand pages of the four volumes, dealing with things as miscellaneous and diverse as the words in the *Standard Dictionary* of the English language, it would be hard to find a single sentence which was not quite clear and obvious to the most ordinary reader. He might not understand all the allusions, poetic and historical references, the epigrams and the sarcasm, but he would perfectly understand the meaning of the words. The sentences are as clear, simple, direct as those of Swift, but without the coarseness or the grittiness of the fierce Dean. *Fors* runs on with an easy mother-speech such as Bunyan, Defoe, Swift, or Goldsmith never sur-

passed; but, at the same time, with a grace and a witchery of fancy that the sardonic Dean of St. Patrick's would have scorned to show.

In the second place, it would be hard to find in these two thousand pages a single dull, conventional, wooden sentence. However nonsensical in thought the remark may be, however childish in tone—and there are many remarks both nonsensical and childish—there is a kind of gentle humour, of fantastic waggery in the phrasing, which is pleasing and quaint, takes it out of the ruck of mere balderdash, and places it in line with the playfulness of genius. The tone is at heart that of Swift in *Lilliput*, or of Carlyle in *Sartor*, or of Thackeray in the *Book of Snobs*. The substance is a satire on our modern vices, ignorances, and vulgarities. But the form is that of child's play, badinage, musical raillery, and courteous irony.

The reader of *Fors* must understand that the whole series of Letters are cast in a tone of irony, sustained pathos, profound sadness, clothed with a veil of humour and even of levity, but always free from the savage bitterness of Swift and from the uncouth mockery of Carlyle. The indignation is as deep as theirs, but it is softened into fantastic playfulness. Such is the nature of the man, and we must take him as we find him. And if Ruskin contrasts himself with Theseus, it is in the same spirit of sardonic irony as that in which Hamlet contrasts himself with Hercules; or, if Ruskin gives us biographic details of his childish life, it is as Hamlet jests in pensive earnest with the skull of Yorick at the grave of Ophelia. *Fors* is a satire on modern life, cast in a form of graceful trifling.

From the literary point of view, its wonderful quality

lies in the utterly unexpected and incalculable sequence of ideas. Each paragraph, each sentence, we may almost say, each phrase, seems to be the last which a reader would look to follow the preceding. It would seem to have no connection at all till we notice the subtle, often fantastic, sometimes almost verbal *nexus* of thought which unites one passage with another. The transition is so sharp, so incalculable, and yet so graceful, at any rate so quaint, that the impression is usually pleasant, and is never obscure. The reader's attention is kept at a pleasing excitement, by the fact that he cannot imagine what is coming next; that when the next thought is presented, it seems wildly incongruous, until the link of ideas is perceived. And the link shows itself before the sentence is finished.

It must be admitted that the limits of playful inconsequence are at times strained or passed. There are passages, no doubt, even those retained in the reduced and revised "new edition" of 1896, that can hardly be said to be composed by a man in perfect command of his own thoughts. Ever since his great cerebral attack, things were wont occasionally to drop from Ruskin's tongue or his pen somewhat as from a man under the influence of a drug, or as if he were talking in his sleep. Words, sounds, or chance associations, suggest a new topic, having only some verbal connection but no logical coherence, almost like the association of two punning words. He says himself (Letter LXII.) that any gambolling on his part, "awkward or untimely as it may have seemed, has been quite as serious, and intentionally progressive, as Morgiana's dance round the captain of the Forty Thieves." "If I took off the harlequin's mask for a moment," he adds, "you would

say I was simply mad." This is in the main true; but there are times, especially when he is playing with words or texts of Scripture, in which inconsequence is not that of cool reason.

Let us pass Letter LXXXII. (September 1877), which opens with a reference to *Baily's Magazine* and a story of a race-horse and his kitten, passes to Fielding, "a truly moral novelist," worth all the moderns since Scott, thence to the question of Capital Punishment, citing a long extract of four pages from Müller's *Dorians*, à propos of the jolly hanging of a highwayman with much strong beer, in the time of George III. Thence to the "modern philanthropist of the 'Newgatory' school." Manchester produces no art, no literature, but has taken "to steal and sell for a profit the waters of Thirlmere and clouds of Helvellyn." The true judgment of which would be not that the Lake of Thirlmere should be brought to the top of Manchester, but that Manchester, or its Corporation, should be put at the bottom of the Lake of Thirlmere. So he would like to destroy the New Town of Edinburgh and the city of New York. And this is serious. He did not jest about these, and he does not jest about Manchester; for the hills and vales of England are the "true temples of God, and their waves and clouds holier than the dew of the baptistery and the incense of the altar." The Manchester robbers should take note of Plato's laws forbidding crimes against the gods. And there follow many pages from Plato's *Laws*. All this, we ought to agree, is the grim irony of a poet who adores the beauty of Nature, and is maddened to extravagance by the disfigurement of Nature by modern Industrialism.

But what can we say of Letter LXXXVII. (March 1878)—"*The Snow Manger*"? And it must be noted that this 87th letter, dated March 1878, was written on the verge of one of those terrible attacks which in the official *Life* is described as "the delirium which was now the chief feature of his disease"—a malady which was publicly recorded by the Proctor in Convocation at Oxford, and for which prayers for his recovery were put up in Italy. Why these outpourings of his troubled brain should be finally included in his works as revised and published by himself and his friends, is a question we cannot answer.

It is a far pleasanter duty to point to the irrepressible playfulness, that Ariel-like—or sometimes Puck-like—grace in which serious moral and spiritual thoughts are wrapped. In Letter VI., 1st June 1871, he explained the scheme of these papers and their "desultory form," so written, he says, that the reader may take trouble. The price (sevenpence) is that of "two pots of beer twelve times in the year," with postage. It has cost him twenty years of thought and hard reading to learn what he has to say in these pamphlets. They cost £10 to print per 1000, and £5 for a picture. A thousand sixpences are £25, which leaves £5 for the author and £5 for the publisher. This is cheap, and is legitimate business. He can only write about the things he cares for, and as they come into his head. For instance, he has just seen the wild hyacinths in the glades of Bagley Wood "opening in flakes of blue fire," through which he slinks, being afraid of the "gamekeeper of the College of the gracious Apostle St. John." He fears that purchasers "will throw my letter, even though it has

cost you sevenpence, aside at once, when I remark to you that these wood hyacinths of Bagley have something to do with the battle of Marathon, and if you knew it, are of much more vital interest to you than even the Match Tax."

It would seem that inconsequence could not go further, unless we accept the "gunpowder that ran out of the heels of their boots"; but it is presently explained, that the wood hyacinth represents the Greek *asphodel*; that the asphodel was the flower of the Elysian fields in which the heroes slain at Marathon went to dwell; that it would be more useful for English workmen to dwell in thought upon Marathon and all it meant and on the Elysium, or Heaven, to which they might hope to go, than to riot about Mr. Lowe's unpopular Match Tax. Theseus made lentil soup on the shore for his people on his return from Crete, and by hoisting a black sail, led his father to commit suicide. And all this follows from the wood hyacinths of Bagley, near Oxford; and it naturally leads on to reflections on the British House of Commons and the terrible conflagrations in Paris in May 1871.

There is some charming harlequinade of the kind in Letter XXIV., November 1872, à propos of Christmas. He will not open the letter with "My friends," because he is in no friendly mood, and gets no friendly answer from any one. Nor will he sign "Faithfully yours" any more, for he is not faithfully his own, and finds other people far from faithfully his. Nor will he sign his name, which he does not like, for it is only short for "Rough Skin." He goes on: "When I got to Oxford, the sky was entirely clear; the Great Bear was near the ground under the pole, and the Charioteer

high overhead, the principal star of him as bright as a gas-lamp."

"It is a curious default in the stars, to my mind, that there is a Charioteer among them without a chariot; and a Waggon with no waggoner; nor any waggon, for that matter, except the Bear's stomach; but I have always wanted to know the history of the absent Charles, who must have stopped, I suppose to drink, while his cart went on, and so never got stellified himself. I wish I knew; but I can tell you less about him than even about Theseus. The Charioteer's story is pretty however—he gave his life for a kiss, and did not get it; got made into stars instead. It would be a dainty tale to tell you under the mistletoe; perhaps I may have time next year; to-day it is of the stars of Ariadne's crown I want to speak."

And thus he is led to wonder that the stories of the stars are all Greek—not Christian, ignorant or forgetful, it would appear, of the obvious explanation that the Greeks created astronomical science, to which the mediæval monks were indifferent. An old lady dying, bedridden, *left*, because she could not take it with her, £200,000, which works out at fourpence a minute; so that she awoke in the morning ten pounds richer than she went to bed—at which "the stars, with deep amaze, stood fixed with steadfast gaze," "for this is a Nativity of an adverse god to the one you profess to honour, with them and the angels, at Christmas, by over-eating yourselves." Over-eating is quite an essential part of the Religion of Christmas, and is about the most religious thing people do in the year. It was a sore question with Ruskin himself as a child that he lost the pleasure of four-sevenths of his life, because of Sunday; for "a lurid shade was cast over Friday and Saturday by the horrible sense that Sunday was coming, and was inevitable." And so we are led

on to Dante's ninth circle of Holiness, cold dinners on Sabbath, and this leads to the Crystal Palace entertainment on Good Friday, and this to the lake of Phlegethon, described in the *Inferno*, and this to Usury, and the Minotaur of Crete, the spirit of lust and anger. The buying an illuminated Koran in MSS., though he could not read it, gave him exquisite delight. Then we come to the story of Theseus and his return from Crete—without Ariadne. His vegetable soup, though, would be poor Christmas cheer.

"Plum-pudding is an Egyptian dish; but have you ever thought how many stories were connected with this Athenian one, pottage of lentils? A bargain of some importance, even to us (especially as usurers); and the healing miracle of Elisha; and the vision of Habakkuk as he was bearing their pottage to the reapers, and had to take it far away to one who needed it more; and, chiefly of all, the soup of the bitter herbs, with its dipped bread and faithful company—'he it is to whom I shall give the sop when I have dipped it.' The meaning of which things, roughly, is, first, that we are not to sell our birthrights for pottage, though we fast to death, but are diligently to know and keep them; secondly, that we are to poison no man's pottage, mental or real; lastly, that we look to it lest we betray the hand which gives us our daily bread."

Ruskin here, as so often, seems to retain a belief in the symbolic and prophetic phrases of Scripture, when he had ceased to hold any belief in the objective facts that the Bible records. He searched it diligently still for revelations of Divine will, or for a kind of *Sortes Virgilianae*.

The Last Supper naturally leads him to quote from the *Pall Mall* the last supper of Annie Redfern, of Chicksand Street, Mile End, who was found dead of asphyxia, as the inquest proved, from living in an

unventilated cellar. The same newspaper urges that the "career" of the Madonna, nursing her baby, is too limited, and that Mr. J. Stuart Mill shows English young women a more lucrative occupation, one to which, it seems, Annie Redfern succumbed. The Athenians kept festival in memory of Theseus's vegetable soup, and sang a beautiful Easter carol. It is too bad to narcotise babies to keep them quiet, as Mr. Stuart Mill and modern political economy encourage mothers to do that they may pursue more lucrative occupations than nursing. Ruskin's mother used to sing, "Hush-a-bye, baby, on the tree top!" and even as an infant he objected to the bad rhyme, "When the wind blows, the cradle will rock." There are no cradles to rock now, and we shall not long want cradle songs.

Read a carol of Chaucer's, but Mr. Mill would advise mothers to work, not to sing. In old pictures of the Nativity doves and rabbits are shown round the saints and angels. Nowadays English gentlemen are not happy unless they are massacring rabbits and doves in heaps.

"Of course, all this is natural to a sporting people who have learned to like the smell of gunpowder, sulphur, and gas-tar better than that of violets and thyme. But, putting the baby-poisoning, pigeon-shooting, and rabbit-shooting of to-day in comparison with the pleasures of the German Madonna, and her simple company, and of Chaucer and his carolling company: and seeing that the present effect of peace upon earth, and well-pleasing in men, is that every nation now spends most of its income in machinery for shooting the best and bravest men, just when they were likely to have become of some use to their fathers and mothers, I put it to you, my friends all, calling you so, I suppose for the last time (unless you are disposed for friendship with Herod instead of Barabbas), whether it would not be more kind and less expensive to

make the machinery a little smaller, and adapt it to spare opium now, and expenses of maintenance and education afterwards (besides no end of diplomacy), by taking our sport in shooting babies instead of rabbits?"

Now, all this is not mere incoherent raving. The irony is not more fierce and continuous than in *Gulliver*, *Candide*, or *Sartor*; and it is neither gross nor crabbed. It is the despairing wail of one who from infancy has felt a passionate love of all things beautiful in Nature and in Art and in the story of Man; who loathes the cruelty of war and the wanton torture inflicted on beautiful and tender creatures by so-called "Sport," the mimic of war; of one whose soul is wrung to madness by the horrors, physical, moral, æsthetic, and spiritual of modern Industrialism; lastly, of a man, saturated, more than any priest, with the words of Scripture and the ideal of the Gospel, and who burns like any St. Francis, or Zwingli, or Latimer, to make them again real guides to living men on earth. Given the spirit of a Hot-gospeller like that, fired with the irrepressible *Œstrus* of the author of *Modern Painters* and the *Seven Lamps*, and you have *Fors Clavigera*, with all its frenzy, its disorder of ideas, its noble appeals, its exquisite tenderness and grace. One might in fancy imagine some "blessed Glendoveer,' some denizen of another planet, Mars or Mercury, wherein the "Laws of Nature" as we know them do not obtain, and where society is cast in forms we call "Utopian," descending on our earth. Such a Martian or Mercurian, perfectly ignorant of our material conditions, sublimely disdainful of our mean and squalid life, profoundly disgusted with our barbarous and cruel habits, might deliver his soul in diatribes not wholly unlike those

of *Fors*. We should enjoy the hearing him; and it would do us good.

If we fairly judge the whole series of Letters in *Fors* and seek to understand their purport, we shall find a perfectly definite scheme of ideas and a real working aim. With a mysterious belief in the creation of all Nature and living creatures by a loving and Almighty God, whose eye watches the fall of every sparrow and the opening of every leaf, mixed with an equally active belief in the polytheistic, or fetichist, sanctity of natural things as objects of worship in themselves, Ruskin had brought himself to regard the disfigurement of natural things and the slaughter of gentle creatures as desecration and sacrilege, almost as a Hindoo regards the slaughter of a Brahminee cow, or a Greek would regard the pollution of a Fountain of the Nymphs. Indignation at the fraudulent character of so much in modern Trade deepened at last into a judgment upon modern Trade itself as criminal and degrading. The horrors of great manufacturing cities drove him to declare himself a violent Communist, ready to accept the Social Liquidation, or destruction of modern society as dreamed by Anarchists. And yet, his early training in Homer, Scott, Plato, and Dante disposed him towards a paternal Autocracy of the Philosopher-King. In much of all this he touched Carlyle, Emerson, William Morris, and Tolstoi. But it must always be remembered that Ruskin was never a political revolutionist; he was a spiritual and moral reformer—his fiercest imprecations dying away into words as tender as those of Jesus when He wept at sight of Jerusalem.

For the yearning towards a new Society, founded on

pure Air, Water, and Earth—on Admiration, Hope, and Love, for the desperate and visionary attempt to start a working model of such a new world, we may forget the many follies and blunders of the prophet of *Fors*—his incorrigible misunderstanding and reviling of such men as Mill, Spencer, and Comte; his childish ignorance of facts in history, language, etymology, and science; his unfairness to friends, and his insolence to opponents everywhere; his intense arrogance and absorption in a sort of cocoon of egoism of his own spinning. Yes! for his great heart and his rare brain were from infancy warped and perverted by two cruel influences—one the isolation in which he was brought up as a kind of Dalai Lama, veiled from touch or sight of the world without; the other, the saturation of mind by a mystical theology, which taught him to treat all things as *absolutely* good, or absolutely *true*, or *absolutely* evil, or *absolutely* false, in a world where, as Auguste Comte has said, all things are *relative*, in a world where humanity can know nothing but *relative* truths, and can hope for nothing but *relative* good.

Ruskin has often been called a follower of Carlyle, and has often been compared to Tolstoi. He claims likeness himself with Swift, and he has certain analogies with Rousseau. But in a great many judgments of history, and in most of his schemes of a social Utopia, he has reached curious coincidences with one of whom he knew nothing, and of whom he spoke with abhorrence and contempt, one to whom in habits of mind and life he was in violent contrast. I often had occasion to remind him, in public and in private, that most of his social doctrines had been anticipated by Auguste Comte. It seems a paradox to mention in

the same sentence the most systematic and the most unsystematic of all modern writers, the most scientific with the most metaphysical, the philosopher with the poet, the most organic of modern thinkers with the most anarchic. Comte had never heard of Ruskin, and Ruskin never mentioned Comte, unless in some grotesque parody of what he fancied Comte might have said, though he actually had said the contrary. The fact remains that Comte and Ruskin are substantially agreed in their view of Greek poetry and religion, mediæval history, Catholicism, the great poets, in their honour of Dante, of Scott, of Gothic architecture, of Italian art; and also in their disbelief in all that is offered by modern Industrialism, by political economy, by the emancipation of women, by democracy, by parliamentarism, by the dogmatism of scientific hypotheses. A follower of Comte, as well as a companion of St. George, might subscribe to the famous vows in Letter LVIII., *mutatis mutandis*, and might accept, with the same reserves, the sixteen aphorisms in Letter LXVII. The poetic, sentimental, metaphysical *nephelococcygia* of *Fors* may find ample analogies and confirmation in the systematic science and the historic religion of the *Positive Polity*.

CHAPTER XV

PRÆTERITA

THE last work of Ruskin, dated from his early home, May 1885, in his sixty-seventh year, is certainly the most charming thing that he ever gave to the world, and is one of the most pathetic and exquisite *Confessions* in the language. After the great cerebral disturbance of 1884 and his final retirement from Oxford, his friend, Professor Eliot Norton, suggested that he should occupy his mind with jotting down reminiscences of his own life, at least, down to the crisis of 1875; and this he began to do at intervals of restored activity. These, with the fragments called *Dilecta*, are now collected in three volumes, and were composed at odd times down to as late as 1889, in Ruskin's seventy-first year.

"I have written these sketches," he says, "frankly, garrulously, and at ease"—and indeed nothing more naïvely frank, more sweetly garrulous, more easy to read, exists in our language. "I write," he goes on, "on my father's birthday [his father had then been dead twenty-one years, his mother also fourteen years], in what was once my nursery in his old house, to which he brought my mother and me, sixty-two years since, I being then four years old. What would otherwise in the following pages have been little more than an old man's recreation in gathering visionary flowers in fields of youth, has taken, as I wrote, the nobler aspect of a dutiful

offering at the grave of parents who trained my childhood to all the good it could attain, and whose memory makes declining life cheerful in the hope of being soon again with them."

"I am, and my father was before me," he begins, "a violent Tory of the old school—Walter Scott's school, that is to say, and Homer's—they were my own two masters." Scott's novels, he says, and Pope's *Iliad* were his daily readings, as a child, with *Robinson Crusoe* and the *Pilgrim's Progress* on Sundays. Here we have the germ of John Ruskin. Greek heroes, myths, kings, and all natural objects peopled with supernatural beings; mediæval chivalry, knights, ladies, priests, yeomen, and burghers; the solitary castaway, reduced to primitive simplicity and bare life in a cabin, detached from modern civilisation; lastly, the mystical theology of Puritanism, with its phantom world of Biblical images made real and ever present. Cold mutton, he says, on Sundays prevented him from adopting the career his mother longed for—that of an evangelical clergyman. He did, however, end in being something of an unattached hedge-preacher, with a Salvation Army of his own devising, of which he was at once the director, the staff, and the whole congregation.

From the daily reading of the Bible aloud to his mother, continued up to manhood, he learned, he says, much of his general power of taking pains and the best part of his taste in literature. Then he gives us those delightful portraits of his father, mother, aunts, cousins, and servants, the severe schooling of his childhood, and the curious habits of touring about the country in which his eyes were trained, how he taught himself to read and write, and how he picked up knowledge of plants, minerals, skies, and hills. The

story of the Domecq family, and of the hopeless passion of the lad for Adèle, has been already given from his own memoir. Nothing is more delicious than the story of Anne, his nurse, who had "a natural gift for doing disagreeable things; above all, the service of a sickroom; so that she was never quite in her glory unless some of us were ill." She had an equal gift for *saying* disagreeable things, and took the darkest view of any subject, before seeking to mend it, so that old Mrs. Ruskin would say, gravely, that if ever a woman in this world were possessed by the Devil, Anne was that woman. And note the companion portrait of old Mause, the very type of Mause Headrigg, who was shocked to see some crumbs thrown out of window, and would dine on potato skins, to give her own dinner away to a poor person. Young John remembered in her the Scottish Puritan spirit in its perfect faith and force, giving to it "the reverence and honour it deserves."

How racy is the story of the travelling carriages and their tours in England and on the continent! First, it was the old chariot, with its "dickey" for the nurse and boy, wherein they visited almost all that was best worth seeing in England. Then it grew into the luxurious travelling carriage of foreign tours, with all its conveniences and charms. Those of us who can remember the *vetturino* of the Alps, Italy, or the Riviera, have memories which the globe-trotter of to-day cannot recall; and some day hereafter, when all locomotion is performed by electricity or in balloons, these garrulous pages of Ruskin's memoirs will have a rare savour:—

"The poor modern slaves and simpletons who let themselves be dragged like cattle, or felled timber, through the countries they imagine themselves visiting, can have no conception

whatever of the complex joys, the ingenious hopes, connected with the choice and arrangement of the travelling carriage in old times—the little apartment which was to be one's home for five or six months."

The British tourist in charge of Mr. Cook may envy or despise the story of the spacious *vettura* that sheltered six persons and was drawn by four stout trotters, the postillions, the courier, the inns advised of company beforehand, the "change of horses," the fifty miles a day of journey, the morning and the evening rest, and stroll round village, or to castle or church. And then after the long daily "trek" from Calais, and through the Black Forest, to Schaffhausen, there burst on the lad, like a vision of heaven, the first view of the snowy Alps—"clear as crystal, sharp on the pure horizon sky, and already tinged with rose by the sinking sun." The sight was a revelation to the young genius—a "call," a destiny.

"I went down that evening from the garden terrace of Schaffhausen with my destiny fixed in all of it that was to be sacred and useful. To that terrace, and the shore of the Lake of Geneva, my heart and faith return to this day, in every impulse that is yet nobly alive in them, and every thought that has in it help or peace."

The record of these early tours, of his home in Surrey, and his visits to the Lakes and the Highlands, is an ample explanation of the formation of his powers; of what Mazzini called "the most analytic mind in Europe"; what Ruskin himself very justly claims to have—"patience in looking and precision in feeling—a thirst for visible fact at once so eager and so methodic." That is a true bit of self-vivisection. And so, too, is the confession that *Don Quixote*, over which,

as a boy, he could laugh to ecstasy, is now become "one of the saddest and, in some things, the most offensive of books to me." Alas! there was in John Ruskin a strain of the Knight of La Mancha, and he, too, had to learn that in this world and in our age knight-errantry however chivalrous in spirit, mediæval romance however beautiful as poetry, will not avail to reform the world with nothing but a rusty lance and a spavined charger. It is magnificent, it may be war; but it is not a real social philosophy, nor is it a possible religion.

He seems to see something of this himself, at least he lets us see it through his sighs and groans over the mistakes made in his early training, in his isolation from all fatigues, risks, companions, and pain, so that boys looked on him as an innocent and treated him as a girl; for "the fountain of pure conceit" in his own heart sustained him against chaff. If only, he says, his parents had given him a shaggy scrap of a Welsh pony, and left him in charge of a Welsh guide and his wife instead of coddling him at home, "they would have made a man of me there and then." And this leads to his delicious story of the efforts made to teach him to ride in a riding-school in Moorfields, and how he would fall off when he turned a corner, till at last his fond parents gave up that part of his education, consoling themselves with the thought that "his not being able to learn to ride was the sign of his being a singular genius."

Delightfully naïve, too, is the story of how John James wooed Margaret Cox "with the same kind of serenity and decision with which afterwards he chose his clerks"; how they waited nine years, and then

"were married in Perth one evening after supper, the servants of the house having no suspicion of the event until John and Margaret drove away together next morning to Edinburgh." John James was certainly more deliberate in love than his mercurial son—and also more constant. We have already seen how the son, at the age of sixty-six, looked back on his own first love at seventeen.

"I had neither the resolution to win Adèle, the courage to do without her, the sense to consider what was at last to come of it all, or the grace to think how disagreeable I was making myself at the time to everybody about me. There was really no more capacity nor intelligence in me than in a just fledged owlet, or just open-eyed puppy, disconsolate at the existence of the moon."

We have seen, too, how he describes his matriculation at Christ Church, and how he disappointed the hopes of his fond parent that he should "take all the prizes every year, and a double first to finish with; marry Lady Clara Vere de Vere; write poetry as good as Byron's, only pious; preach sermons as good as Bossuet's, only Protestant; be made, at forty, Bishop of Winchester, and, at fifty, Primate of England." There was no fear of his gambling, for he looked on dice as people look on dynamite. No fear of the strange woman, for he was in love, and never out after half-past nine. No fear of debt, for there were no Turners to be had in Oxford, and he cared for no other possession. No fear of a fall out hunting, for he could not sit a hack. No fear of ruining himself at races, for he had no wish to win anybody's money. Besides, he had to go to tea every evening with his mother.

Nothing in *Præterita* is more fascinating and also illuminating than the author's description of his own passion for nature. "I had, in my little clay pitcher, vialfuls, as it were, of Wordsworth's reverence, Shelley's sensitiveness, Turner's accuracy, all in one. A snowdrop was to me, as to Wordsworth, part of the Sermon on the Mount; but I never should have written sonnets to the celandine, because it is of coarse yellow and imperfect form. With Shelley, I loved blue sky and blue eyes, but never in the least confused the heavens with my own little Psychidion. . . . I did not weary myself in wishing that a daisy could see the beauty of its shadow, but in trying to draw the shadow rightly myself."

"Nobody," he says in 1839, "cared for Turner but the retired coachmaker of Tottenham and I." I can only say, for myself, that in the earliest forties I had been trained by my father to admire Turner, and used to be taken every May to admire them in Trafalgar Square. One of the paradoxes of Ruskin's mind is the indifference he felt towards Italy and Italian art as a youth. He was taken to Florence and Rome from Oxford in 1840, in his twenty-second year; and he says, quite truly, that he was "in total ignorance of what early Christian art meant." He felt "grievous disappointment" in Florence; all sacred art was "a mere zero"; and the Tribune of the Uffizi "an unbecoming medley, got together by people who knew nothing, and cared less than nothing, about the arts." As they reached Rome the Calvinist parents observed with triumph that the "nearer to Rome the road got worse." The Forum, St. Peter's, the Coliseum, the Capitol, were all equally "uninteresting." The

"Transfiguration" of Raphael was an "ugly" picture. The "Stanze" could give nobody any pleasure. He was again "disappointed" with Naples and everything around it. To us in the twentieth century it seems incredible that sixty years ago a young man of real genius for art, who had studied art, and had written on art from childhood, could have been in such a state of callous ignorance on his first visit to Italy. But we may remember all the changes of view that, in these sixty years, *Modern Painters* and the *Seven Lamps* have produced on us. We may remember also that John was in bad health—sent abroad to save his life. He tells us that Rome was the very worst place he could have been sent to; and that he was, all that time, "simply a little floppy and soppy tadpole."

Return to the Alps, the glaciers and lakes of Switzerland restored health to the wearied brain and delicate frame. It is a wonderful story of the miraculous effect on Ruskin of mountains, as he tells us in *Præterita*—a story worth the attention of psychologists and physicians. Some of his most exquisite word-pictures of scenery are to be found in these volumes; often extracted from his diary at the time, and intended for no eye but his own; such as the grand view from the Dôle—from the Col de la Faucille (*Præt.* i. 193). I saw it myself at sunrise in 1851, on one of the most magnificent crimson morning skies before storm that ever eye beheld. Another wonderful bit is of the Rhone below Geneva (*Præt.* ii. 90), one of the most superb pictures that Ruskin ever drew in prose, or again the glacier torrent of the Triolet (*Præt.* ii. 221). An interesting record for us is that in 1849 (*ætat.* thirty) it was the sight of the hard lot of the Alpine

peasant which first turned him to meditate on the social question —was the origin of the design of St. George's Guild, "closed his days of youthful happiness, and began his true work in the world—for what it is worth."

Præterita gives us, with *Fors*, a complete account of the gradual development of religious thought in Ruskin's mind. Brought up a strict Evangelical and Biblical Christian from childhood, he retained *belief* in that faith till manhood, though it is clear that he did not feel for it deep and spiritual *sympathy*. His long studies of foreign people and of mediæval art gradually weaned him from Evangelical views; and as he says in 1845 (*ætat.* twenty-six), they were being replaced by more Catholic sympathies. "Why did I not become a Catholic then?" he asks; and replies, "Why did I not become a Fire-worshipper?"—loving the sun so much. He tells us that his visit to Italy in 1858 (*ætat.* thirty-seven) marked his "final apostasy from Puritan doctrine." Intimacy with Carlyle, Froude, and others led him to very latitudinarian views of all dogmatic theology, without impairing his intense hold on the conception of God's Providence and the spiritual meaning of Scripture. The tragedy of his life—repudiation by Rose La Touche and her death—turned him back to a more definitely Christian condition, and in this mood the last twenty years of his fast-ebbing life were passed, wholly detached from any formal church or doctrinal school. A passage in *Præterita* (iii. 7) well expresses the root religion of his life—

"While these convictions [condemnation of all forms of monasticism] prevented me from being ever led into accept-

ance of Catholic teaching by my reverence for the Catholic art of the great ages,—and the less, because the Catholic art of these small ages can say but little for itself,—I grew also daily more sure that the peace of God rested on all the dutiful and kindly hearts of the laborious poor; and that the only constant form of pure religion was in useful work, faithful love, and stintless charity."

Well! that is the essence of the religion of Humanity.

CHAPTER XVI

LAST DAYS

THE last ten years of Ruskin's long life (1889-1899) were passed in close retirement and in complete rest, broken only by a rare visit from an intimate, a few words about his publications and the works of others, and from time to time the loss of a dear friend. He enjoyed life, could walk, play chess, listen to a reading, turn over the pages of a book he loved, suck up the fragrance of his roses, and gaze wistfully across the lake at the Coniston Old Man. Slowly his strength ebbed away without suffering or illness, till at last he became an invalid in a Bath chair, passing most of his time in his bedroom and study, with but the company of one or other of the Severn family, who watched over him with tender care.

His eightieth birthday (8th February 1899) was celebrated with a shower of letters, telegrams, addresses, flowers, and gifts from all parts of the country, and even of the world. The great address, illuminated on vellum, signed by the Prince of Wales and a crowd of official personages, was presented by a deputation. The University of Oxford, the London Ruskin Society, the Coniston Parish Council, sent similar addresses; private friends poured in their congratulations, and the press joined in with hearty sympathy. One night

he stood looking at the portrait of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, and gazing, said, "That's my dear brother Ned." Next day the artist died, and this was the worst blow the old man had to bear. All that autumn and winter he remained very feeble, but clear in mind, and at peace.

In January 1900 influenza raged in Coniston, and at last reached Brantwood. On 18th January he was seized, rallied next day, but on the 20th the heart failed, and he sank softly asleep surrounded by his dear ones, in the room hung round with his beloved Turners. Without a word or a struggle he had passed into his last sleep. He died within two weeks of his eighty-first birthday. The world at large, the world of letters, the press, and the many Societies connected with his name and work, sounded his praises and rehearsed his good deeds in words that were fit, but somewhat too late.

By his own express desire, the family caused him to be buried in Coniston Churchyard, and they declined the offer of a grave in Westminster Abbey. A bronze medallion, by Onslow Ford, R.A., was raised there by a large body of his friends and admirers, and a place chosen for it in Poets' Corner in the Abbey, close beside the bust of Walter Scott. It was unveiled by Mrs. Severn on his birthday, 8th February 1902. With a simple village funeral, and with a gathering of relations and intimates, he was laid in a grave beside his old friends, the Beevers, beneath a fir tree, close to the children's school. The only unusual feature in the burial was the presence of rich colours, and the absence of all black, which he so hated even in mourning. The pall upon his coffin was of bright crimson silk, embroidered with his favourite wild

roses on a grey field, and inscribed with the motto, *Unto this Last.* The chancel was filled with wreaths, white, green, and violet; and foremost of all was the great cross laid there by his cousin, Joan Severn, consisting of the red roses he loved.

"There was no black about his burying, except what we wore for our own sorrow," says his friend, secretary, and biographer, who has left so fine a tribute, in the *Life*, to the memory of his master.

Let there be no black about our memory of him, say all of us who love a beautiful nature and honour a rare genius.

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